

# Revolutionary Perspectives

16



## Is Capitalism Finished?

WTO in Seattle  
BT Call Centre Strikes  
Rank and File Trades Unionism  
The Condition of the British Working Class  
Nationalisation is a Capitalist Demand  
The Second Congress of the KAPD  
Barbarism in the Caucasus

**Revolutionary Perspectives**  
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**For contact**  
**CWO**  
**P.O. Box 338**  
**Sheffield S3 9YX, UK.**

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# Capitalism 2000

## Is the End Nigh?

**A**s capitalism celebrates its manufactured millennium its prophets tell us that humanity has arrived at "the end of history". The *Financial Times*, mouthpiece of mega-business, informs us that the history of the twentieth century proves one thing: "utopias" are always bad and that the only aim of social action should be to "defend individual liberty". Of course this overlooks the fact that some are more free than others. If you are rich and powerful you are not only more free but also the one who makes the decisions that confines half the world's population to poverty. Whilst 3 billion people live on less than \$2 a day in the year 2000 the richest 1% of the world's population owns 40% of global wealth. The richest 20% of the world's population consume 90% of the world's output. But it is not a question of geography. It is a question of class. Amongst the "richest 20%" are the 14-16 million people in Britain (according to the Department of Health and Social Security) who live in poverty (i.e. earn less than half the average wage).

The *Financial Times* tries to put a gloss on this picture by pointing

out that male life expectancy in India has risen from less than 40 years in 1900 to 62 years today. This only confirms Disraeli's adage about "lies, damn lies and statistics". Not only was life expectancy in India greater in the pre-capitalist past (1900 was a year of famine in British-controlled India) but

current figures are almost entirely down to one factor - the suppression of malaria (which is once again rising in new and virulent forms). The real picture is that capitalism cannot survive without the increasing centralisation of wealth in the hands of fewer and fewer of the capitalist class.

With all the millennium hype created by capitalist states to divert us from the terrible reality of their failing system

critique of this increasingly rotten system.

### The Origins of Capitalism

**M**arx wrote in 1867 that capital comes into the world

*dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt.*

*Capital Volume One (Penguin Classic edition) p.926*

The transatlantic slave trade (involving the forcible shipment of at some 17 million Africans, at least one third of whom died in "the Middle Passage"), the brutality of child labour in European mines and factories, the genocide of 16 million North Americans in little over a century (with a similar, if not greater number in "Spanish America") meant that capitalism did not exactly arise naturally and benignly out of feudalism<sup>1</sup>. But the burgher (or, in French, bourgeois) manufacturers who inhabited the towns (which had grown under royal charters in the Middle Ages) had long grown impatient of the restrictive laws of

## The Bowman Project

One British example of the relationship between state and monopoly capitalism is the saga of the British Army's radios. British troops are still using Clansman radios from the 1960's. All the attempts to get a replacement were supposed to have been completed by 1996. However this has not happened. The Army tried to hold a competition to produce a new radio system between Siemens Plessey and the US-owned, ITT industries. But this collapsed when neither side was prepared to undergo the risk of development costs which might have been a total loss. After several years of bungle and delay, the government's solution has been to get the two competitors to form a joint holding company (the unhappily named Archer Communication Industries) to develop the system together. Even then Archer (which has Army officers representing the government on its board) has submitted a costing of 3.9 billions which is about twice the budget allocated by the Ministry of Defence. So much for capitalist competition creating efficient production! The fact is that the quantities of capital involved make such long-term projects unattractive for monopoly capital unless the returns are guaranteed. By setting up Archer the government has now been able to offer such a guarantee. It will be 2005 before even 10% of the Army's equipment will be modernised. In the meantime the British Army might be better buying mobile phones!

All facts from *The Financial Times* 28.12.99

we cannot let the opportunity pass to draw up our own balance sheet. We won't be focusing on the last millennium but on the last two hundred and fifty years - the epoch of capitalism. What we will be doing is reminding ourselves of the validity of the Marxist

the feudal system (a system designed to protect landed aristocrats). As their wealth developed the bourgeoisie became frustrated by feudal laws and institutions such as internal tariffs and restrictions on the amount that could be produced or the numbers that could



be employed in any one industry. These held them back from becoming even more wealthy. However their wealth allowed them to acquire the political power either to influence and transform the state or, where the state resisted, as in France in 1789, they overthrew it and replaced it with one under their class control. Whichever route they took the end result was the same - the end of the feudal order.

When talking about this origin of capitalism Marx states of feudalism that,

*At a certain stage of development, it brings into the world the material means of its own destruction. From that moment new forces and new passions spring up in the bosom of society, forces and passions which feel themselves to be fettered by that society. It has to be annihilated. It is annihilated.*

Capital Volume One (Penguin Classic edition) Chapter 32 *The Historical Tendency of Capitalist Accumulation* p.928

This idea of a mode of production existing until a new, more dynamic mode of production came along is central to Marxism. Feudalism existed for centuries alongside the dynamic manufacturing sector of the towns. It was only when feudalism's own laws and institutions came into conflict with the possibilities for greater expansion of the capitalist manufacture, when feudalism became a "fetter" (another central idea of Marx mentioned several times in Capital) on the further growth of the economy (called, "productive forces", by Marx), that the capitalist (bourgeois) revolution takes place.

The establishment of the capitalist system brought with it an enormous outpouring of productive energy based on its new dynamic which revolutionised the productive forces (the steam age) and then revolutionised them all again (electricity) within a

century. The difference between Marx and the other critics of capitalism in the nineteenth century was that they looked backwards to some non-existent "golden age" of rural bliss. They were, in fact only opponents of industrialism - not capitalism. Marx on the other hand saw the potential for human development that capitalism had unleashed. He saw it as "progressive" for humanity. But he also saw that it was full of contradictions and would not last forever.



*Another capitalist obscenity: millions live on the breadline in the richest country in the world where 30% of adults are officially classed as "obese"*

## The Contradictions of Capitalism

This was absolutely opposed to the reigning ideas of the day. Adam Smith (who wrote *The Wealth of Nations* in 1776), David Ricardo, and all the political economists of the early nineteenth century had always considered that capitalism was the finally discovered, truly efficient, mode of production for humanity. Capitalism was, for them, literally "the end of history". Then along came Marx. Marx spotted that all previous societies had

been societies based on scarcity. Capitalism's problems were the opposite. It is the first society where economic problems arise not out of scarcity but out of abundance. This abundance is produced by a working class who are so heavily exploited that they receive back in wages insufficient amounts to buy enough food, clothing and shelter for themselves and their dependants. In the early days of the Industrial Revolution even whole families working together lived on the margins of hunger. This was capitalism's first contradiction. The class that produced its wealth was increasingly excluded from being able to enjoy it.

*There are not too many necessities of life produced, in proportion to the existing population. Quite the reverse. Too little is produced to decently and humanely satisfy the wants of the great mass.*

*The stupendous productivity developing under the capitalist mode of production... contradicts the basis, which constantly narrows in relation to expanding wealth... hence the crises.*

Capital Volume III (Lawrence and Wishart edition p.257 and p.266)

But not content with reducing workers to the margins of existence, the capitalist system is also one of a fight to the economic death between individual capitalists. It is not enough to make a profit. Each capitalist has to have a higher rate of profit than his rival. This means that each capitalist has to find more efficient ways of increasing the productivity of the labour they employ. Those who fail go under and in the last century their rivals bought them out. As Marx wrote "One capitalist kills many". As the last century wore on this process led to an ever-increasing concentration of capital in fewer and fewer hands. Marx put this very clearly in *Capital Volume One*. As soon as the change from feudal production

*has sufficiently decomposed the old society throughout its depth and breadth, as soon as the workers have been turned into proletarians, and their means of*



*labour into capital, as soon as the capitalist mode of production stands on its own feet, the further socialization of labour and the further transformation of the soil and other means of production into socially exploited and therefore communal means of production takes on a new form. What is now to be expropriated is not the self-employed worker but the capitalist who exploits a large number of workers.*

op cit, p.928

And this process goes on to a point where there is almost complete domination of some branches of a national economy by a single firm. We have not only entered the era of national monopoly but also the era of a world economy.

*This expropriation is accomplished through the action of the immanent laws of capitalist production itself, through the centralization of capitals. One capitalist strikes down many others.*

*Hand in hand with this centralization, or this expropriation of many capitalist by a few, other developments take place on an ever-increasing scale, such as ... the entanglement of all peoples in the net of the world market, and with this, the growth of the international character of the capitalist regime.*

loc. cit.

## Monopoly Capitalism

Monopoly capitalism is, in some ways, the negation of capitalism. Under monopoly conditions the "unseen hand" of competition, which is supposed to make capitalism so efficient (in the theories of Adam Smith etc.), has all but been destroyed. Now monopolies control huge swathes of the economy and can actually begin to divert extra surplus value from other, smaller, capitalists towards themselves via price-fixing cartels etc.

Nowhere is this better illustrated in the period just after Marx was writing than

the USA. The spokesman of monopoly was one of the greatest monopolists himself - John D Rockefeller. In contrast to Adam Smith, he argued that the formation of giant monopolies would eliminate the inefficiency of the capitalist market. Monopoly was

*the origin of the whole system of modern economic administration. It has revolutionized the way of doing business all over the world. The time was ripe for it. It had to come though all we saw at the moment was the need to save ourselves from wasteful conditions. The day of combination is here to stay. Individualism has gone for ever.*

The *Financial Times* would have been choking on its equities (except that it wasn't founded until 1888)! Rockefeller was, of course, only expressing a brutal truth. He has also (like Marx) been proved right and did not feel that he had to hide behind the mystifications about "individual liberty" of today's capitalist commentators. Monopoly conditions are the conditions under which capitalism continues to operate - though both Rockefeller and Marx were writing about something which was as yet in its infancy. However, within a few years of the publication of *Capital*, the improvement in American continental communications (in this case via railways rather than the internet) and the great crisis of 1873 was to allow the Rockefellers of the US economy to strike down their rivals. Rockefeller himself forced rivals to use his pipelines at his prices and then offered a ridiculously low price to buy out their firms. Once the crisis of 1873 hit Rockefeller became even more ruthless. Rivals had no choice but to accept his price and by 1880 he controlled 90% of US oil refining in the USA. At the same time Swift in meat, Pillsbury in grain, Weyerhaeuser in lumber, Duke in tobacco, Vanderbilt and Jay Gould in railways, and Carnegie (himself bought out by J.P. Morgan in 1900) in steel were all doing the same thing. Even so by 1893 there were still only 12 monopoly capitals. Another decennial crisis that year however laid waste to many smaller firms and by 1904 318 large combines operated over 5,000 large plants across the USA.

The flood of corporate money into the government was so great that the monopolies controlled the political process. Money bought votes. As Secretary of State William Seward explained

*A political party is a joint-stock company in which those who contribute the most direct the action and management of the concern.*

The same monopolies that ran the Republican Party also ran the Democratic Party. Politicians could do what they liked as long as they did nothing to interfere with the "robber barons" interests. Indeed the state was no more than the arbitrator between the monopolies. Popular revulsion at the antics of the robber barons did force the government to bring in so-called "anti-trust" laws. In theory these were to protect citizens from the predations of the monopolies. In reality they were simply gentlemen's rules by which all the monopolies operated within the USA. The Supreme Court underwrote the power of the monopolies. The Sherman Anti-Trust Act of 1890 was effectively dead when, in 1895, the Supreme Court decreed that the E.C. Knight Co. was only restraining trade "indirectly". The company in question refined 98% of US sugar! When the Rockefeller-Morgan empire was eventually forced to "demerge" Standard Oil in 1912 it was a sign that the state was already having to intervene in the "natural" laws of capitalism. This intervention was not however a victory for the ordinary citizen - it was victory for the other "robber barons" of US big business.

## Imperialism

In every major capitalist country in the years 1890-1900 monopolies identified with national governments. Government policy was now directed towards ensuring that national monopolies were supported by the state. At home laws favoured the monopolies against their own workers whilst in their struggle with foreign monopolies, even in the most peripheral areas of the world, the military resources of the state were mobilised. The struggle for sources of cheap raw materials, cheap labour and



new markets was now one between national rather than individual capitals. This was the era of the "world economy" as Bukharin called it. It was also the era of imperialism and it is this which has dominated the twentieth century. At the same time the contracts the state offered, particularly in relation to defence contracts increasingly brought an intertwining of state and monopoly capital. This latter process was enormously accelerated by the First World War.

In the run up to 1914 imperialism, militarism and colonial rivalry ran wild. Even the United States which came late into the scramble for colonies had proclaimed its "Manifest Destiny" to rule over the "cheating manana lot" as President Theodore Roosevelt referred to Latin Americans. Anti-semitism is not the only racist ideology produced by imperialism in this century. Needless to say colonies in Cuba and the Philippines were acquired by the USA after the first imperialist war of the twentieth century against Spain (1898-1902).

Revolutionaries like Lenin, Luxemburg<sup>5</sup> and Bukharin all analysed this tendency towards imperialism. But they always assumed that the working class, organised in their millions in the Social Democratic Parties and their trade unions would be strong enough to prevent imperialism from inflicting its ultimatum attack on the workers - global war. Indeed in the first two decades of the twentieth century the final part of Marx's analysis of the historic course of monopoly capitalism in *Capital* Volume One seemed to be coming true.

*Along with the constant decrease in the number of capitalist magnates, who usurp and monopolize all the advantages of this process of transformation, the mass of misery, oppression slavery, degradation and exploitation grows; but with this there also grows the revolt of the working class, a class constantly increasing in numbers, and trained, united and organized by the very mechanism of the capitalist process of production. The monopoly of capital becomes a fetter upon the mode of*

*production which has flourished alongside and under it. The centralization of the means of production and the socialization of labour reach a point at which they become incompatible with their capitalist integument. This integument is burst asunder. The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated.*

op cit. p. 929

What neither Marx, nor Lenin nor Luxemburg could have predicted was that the working class would be led into imperialist war by the very Social Democrats who had voted against it time and again in International Congresses. The biggest betrayal was in Germany where the trades unions and right-wing Social Democrats not only voted war money for the Kaiser but had even entered a secret pact with the German General Staff before 1914 to ensure that there would be no "civil disturbances" in the event of war. This set the tone of the twentieth century as all the national labour movements became, and have remained, outright agents of their "own" imperialisms. Only the revolutionaries who broke with Social Democracy now carried the message of Marx forward.

Lenin wrote his *Imperialism* in the middle of the First World War to explain how it had come about. He followed on from Marx by noting the five basic features of the new imperialism

*(1) the concentration of production and capital has developed to such a high stage that it has created monopolies which play a decisive role in economic life; (2) the merging of bank capital with industrial capital and the creation, on the basis of this 'finance capital', of a financial oligarchy; (3) the export of capital as distinguished from the export of commodities acquires exceptional importance; (4) the formation of international monopolist capitalist associations which share the world among themselves, and (5) the territorial division of the whole world among*

*the biggest capitalist powers is complete.*

*Imperialism - the Highest Stage of Capitalism in Collected Works Vol. 22 p.266*

For Lenin the time when the "new capitalism" definitely superseded the old could be dated with some precision - it was the start of the twentieth century<sup>6</sup>. Now the situation was different. Monopoly and state military identification with monopolies had ended the progressive role of capitalism. We had now entered the era of "the decay and parasitism of capital." Now capitalist crises could not be solved by simply the writing off capital values. A capitalist could not simply buy up a rival cheaply. Now capitalism was at such a stage of concentration that only the massive destruction of opposing economies as well as the seizure of their resources was sufficient for restarting the capitalist cycle of accumulation. What had been a cycle of boom - slump - concentration - boom during capitalism's "progressive" period, as Marx had called it, had now become an infernal cycle of boom - slump - war. And war, as the First and Second World Wars demonstrated is about a war to the final exhaustion, if not annihilation, of the opposition. These wars involved the deaths of somewhere between 70 and 100 millions of people. In the Second World War the vast majority were civilians deliberately and systematically murdered as a policy of terror by both sides. The common thread that runs through the twentieth century is this struggle between the major capitalist powers to control the earth's resources. From the Spanish-American and Boer Wars to the current war in the Caucasus the bottom line has been to win control of economic resources for the nation state<sup>7</sup>. All the horrors of the twentieth century from the concentration camps set up by the British in South Africa in 1900, right through to the genocide in ex-Yugoslavia in the 1990s are a consequence of this internecine imperialist struggle.

Despite this the last part of Marx's analysis has yet to be carried out. The expropriators have not yet been expropriated. For the ruling class this is evidence enough that it never will.



Add to that the failure of the Russian Revolution to establish socialism and the capitalists can say not only was Stalinism socialism but also that socialism has failed. But capitalism remains capitalism. It continually reproduces the same contradictions we have described above. Since the Second World War we had a period of boom which lasted until 1971 but then came the latest slump. This period of slump or crisis has lasted nearly 30 years but it has yet to be resolved. Capitalism survives today on a fantasy economy on one side (financial speculation has reached unheard of levels) and a mountain of increasing misery on the other. Famine, war and man-made disaster are permanently present. They are the price that humanity has to pay for the continuing crisis of the system. Ultimately capitalism is preparing for a new world war. The only force which has the potential to stop it is the working class. The capitalists are well aware of this (hence the never-ending propaganda about "the end of communism"). At the end of the Second World War welfare states were set up in all the major imperialist powers. Workers had to be tied to the capitalist state for which so many of them had fought and died under the guise of "anti fascism". The trades unions which had been founded to resist capital had made peace with imperialism in 1914 and acted as the state's agent within the working class. The welfare state could be passed off as a form of "democratic socialism". At the same time the state took a greater and greater control in the management of the economy in order to preserve the national industrial base of each of the imperialist powers. Keynesianism ruled OK. This collapsed with the US devaluation of the dollar in 1971. The Bretton Woods system of international co-operation established in 1946 to ensure increased trade was successful during the boom but the post-1971 slump means that new forces of finance capital were unleashed. Monopoly finance capital now became globalised monopoly finance capital. New mergers were created until today we have situation where the state can no longer even play the role of lender of last resort. Since 1990 \$20,000 bn has been spent on mergers. This is two and half times the GDP of the United

States. Now 200 companies, 90% of whom have their head offices in the G7 countries dominate the globe. According to Frederic F. Clairmont

*Since 1982 the turnover of the 200 has risen from \$3,000bn to \$7,000bn and, despite the contraction in the world economy, their annual growth in current prices was twice that of the 29 members of the OECD.*

See *Powers of the World's True Masters in Le Monde Diplomatique*, Dec. 1999.

Most of this financial growth is speculative and artificial. The volume of money travelling round the globe per day exceeds by a factor of 4000 the amount actually produced by manufacturing. This is helping to keep the consequences of the crisis from destroying the system but the actual crisis has not disappeared. All that is happening is that a vast amount of debt and paper wealth is being accumulated. The day of reckoning will have to come sooner or later. But before revolutionaries can rejoice we have to remember that capitalism might collapse from its own contradictions but communism cannot be built except consciously by the working class themselves. Marx poses a historic alternative in the Communist Manifesto. In the course of history the class struggle has led

*either to the revolutionary reconstitution of society or the common ruin of the contending classes.*

Currently the working class is on the retreat in the class struggle and is unprepared for the responsibilities which history will thrust upon it. This is why we call on all those who recognise what the real position of the working class is to join in the struggle to reconstitute the revolutionary class party as the only body which can carry the communist programme, the product of the revolutionary experience of the working class into the next critical class confrontation. The capitalists may have just celebrated one more century of their rule, let's not allow them to celebrate another.

Jack

#### Footnotes

1. The violence and rapine of capitalism did not stop there. In 1750 China and India had been the two greatest industrial producers in the world. Indian spices, cotton and precious stones, China's porcelain, tea and silks were the major commodities in world trade. Within one hundred years both great areas were politically and economically dominated by Europeans. The Chinese Emperor had rightly told emissaries of George III in the 1790s that Europeans produced nothing that China wanted. In the 1840s the unwanted commodity of opium was being forced down the throats of Chinese. When the Chinese Empire tried to prevent the English opium trade the British answer was war. It was not just the cheap price of European commodities that were used to batter down all Chinese walls. The forced destruction of the Indian cotton industry paved the way for Lancashire to expand and by the 1850s the destruction of the economic strength of India had been all but completed.

2. This was in the original Samuel Moore translation of Capital Vol.1. The one we cite elsewhere in the article may be more accurate but it sometimes loses the poetry!

3. Rockefeller in 1870, quoted in *The Free and the Unfree*, P. Carroll and D. Noble (Penguin 1988) p.261

4. Quote in Harvey Wassermann, *History of the United States (Four Walls Eight Windows 1988)* p.25

5. Although we disagree with the precise theory of Rosa Luxemburg as readers can see by looking at the previous issue of *Revolutionary Perspectives*

6. See *Imperialism - The Highest Stage of Capitalism in Collected Works Vol. 22* p. 200

7. Imperialism though should not be confused with colonialism. Colonialism had preceded imperialism. Britain, France, Portugal and the Netherlands had established huge overseas empires but most of these were established at the time of mercantile capitalism when selling the exotic produce of non-European cultures (after plundering or buying them cheaply) was the major source of finance which was to pave the way for the capitalist system to develop. Whilst mercantile colonialism is a condition of the growth of capitalism, imperialism is one of its consequences.



# In the Margins of the BT Strike

For some time we have been urging one of our comrades to write the "social document" on the nature of work in call centres, and this article is printed on the opposite page. More people work in call centres than in any other job in Britain. There are 350,000 workers employed in 4,000 call centres around the country. This is more than the current total for all coal, car and steel workers put together and is expected to rise to 500,000 within three years. It is also one of the areas where the working class is more concentrated than any other (today 90% of "businesses" in Britain employ less than ten people).

Our comrade wrote just before the BT strike began on November 22nd last year. Conditions in BT call centres are seen as better than most yet the main demand of the BT strikers was for less management bullying and an end to ridiculous target-setting. The workers in BT call centres who belonged to the Communication Workers Union voted for three one day strikes. This was little enough considering the nature of the exploitation. However the union soon showed what unions have always shown. Their main agenda is to arrive at an "accommodation" with management. Only one of the three day strikes ever took place. Was this because the management caved in? Not a bit. The union had achieved its objective. It had won the right to be recognised as the spokesman for the workers in BT call centres by agreeing to

*work at making BT's call centres the hallmark by which other companies will be judged.*

Quoted in the *Financial Times* 9.12.99

Fine for BT but what did the workers get out of protesting against the horrendous conditions in these call centres? A stress management programme! The demand that casual workers get the same pay and conditions as regular workers was

rejected so BT can use even cheaper labour at will.

## Unions Against Workers

This is not a result of the unions "selling out" the workers. They are not on our side in the first place. Today they only act to manage the sale of labour power in the interests of the capitalist nation state. They cannot be changed by a different leadership (as Trotskyists claim) because the function of unions is to preserve the capitalist system (you don't need unions when the workers actually own and administer society themselves). Anyone with any minimum knowledge of trade union history will know that "radical", "left" leaders (like Lord Chapple etc.) have all gone over to the open sabotage of strikes once they got to power. This is not an accident it is because the unions exist to maintain workers as wage labourers under capitalism. For revolutionaries it means that the way forward has to be in struggle outside of and against the union apparatus. This is why we think organisations like the Socialist Workers Party are the opposite of revolutionary despite their claims to the contrary.

In a recent *Socialist Worker* they ran a report on the CWU, the same union involved in the BT dispute. They listed several ways in which it had "trampled on union democracy" (only the SWP actually believes that such a thing exists) to force a deal on posties which the union had agreed with the Royal Mail. The deal will have union officials sitting with Royal Mail management on the disciplinary panel to sack workers who refuse to deliver certain types of mail (including BNP election material). Despite this the SWP merely call for a new leadership and the same issue runs the banner slogan "Time to get unionised" (*Socialist Worker* 15.1.2000). Workers could be forgiven for asking "what for?"

However workers in the new sectors who have no experience of the way in which unions work could easily be fooled by the propaganda that we need them to defend us. At the moment many of the more militant workers in call centres tell us that what they need is a union to help them resist the bosses. They think that it would bring the organisation to give them more confidence to fight back. But the examples we have given here show that a real fight is not part of the union agenda. Here we must not mistake "unity" with "the union". We do need to organise together but we cannot rely on unions to do it for us. A real struggle means organising our own strike committees of elected and recallable delegates. These have to be controlled by regular meetings of all the workers involved in assemblies. This not only ensures that everyone is informed of what is going on but also takes an active part in the struggle. Leaving a struggle to a few individuals is the road to defeat. Our strength is our collective capacity to fight together. Ultimately the only answer to the horrors that capitalism increasingly brings upon humanity lies in that collective will to paralyse the system. Once workers realise once again their real strength then it is a short step to a political struggle for a better society. We are still a long way from that and many bitter lessons of the class struggle from the past will have to be relearned. But the capitalist crisis and the class struggle have not gone away. The new votes for strikes in car factories, in call centres, in bus firms (where drivers earn even less than call centre workers), in the postal service and in engineering works across the country may not be big headlines yet. But they are indications that no amount of spin-doctoring, no amount of propaganda about the "class war being over" will actually wish us away. And when we do begin to move we will have to be ready to move against both the bosses and the unions.



# The Condition of the Working Class in England — A Modest Addition for the Year 2000

For the ruling class, if we are to believe its version of truth, exploitation is a thing of the past. Now equal opportunities guarantee fairness and personal effort determines one's experience of life whilst high technology paves the road to progress. But for many of us, real experience smashes this fairy tale of universal content. In spite of all attempts to bury Marxism and the working class threat to the status quo, the communist condemnation of capitalism, first elaborated in the nineteenth century, applies equally to the current version.

In 1844/45, Marx's fellow co-founder of scientific socialism, Frederick Engels wrote "The Condition of the Working Class in England". Who can seriously claim that the poverty and social injustice Engels described have no basis in today's society? Consider this passage which expresses the real relationship between the worker and his work:

*Nothing is more terrible than being constrained to do some one thing every day from morning until night against one's will. And the more a man the worker feels himself, the more hateful must his work be to him, because he feels the constraint, the aimlessness of it for himself. Why does he work? For love of work? From a natural impulse? Not at all! He works for money, for a thing which has nothing to do with the work itself, and he works so long, moreover, and in such unbroken monotony, that this alone must make his work a torture in the first few weeks if he*

*has the least human feeling left. The division of labour has multiplied the brutalising influences of forced work. In most branches the worker's activity is*



*reduced to some paltry, purely mechanical manipulation, repeated minute after minute, unchanged year after year. The worker's activity is made easy, muscular effort is saved, but the work itself becomes unmeaning and monotonous to the last degree. It offers no field for mental activity and claims just enough of his attention to keep him from thinking of anything else.*

*reduced to some paltry, purely mechanical manipulation, repeated minute after minute, unchanged year after year. The worker's activity is made easy, muscular effort is saved, but the work itself becomes unmeaning and monotonous to the last degree. It offers no field for mental activity and claims just enough of his attention to keep him from thinking of anything else.*

F. Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England*

Anyone who has experienced any of the array of low quality employment opportunities which mass unemployment has forced upon many of our class know exactly what Engels

meant. For the past ten months I have been working in a call centre. Prior to that I had been unemployed for 13 months. The job involves providing customer service to users of BT mobile phones. However, I do not work for BT but for a smaller company which has a contract with BT, as such sadly my workplace was only slightly affected by recent strike action, which did in fact involve staff with whom I work. The following is an impression of call centre life, in essence there is no divergence from the perspective set out by Engels. Call centre work involves a large fraction of the workforce today, in fact it is the largest occupational category of the working class when considered in national terms. It has been responsible for reducing official unemployment counts in some of the most depressed areas. I work in a former pit village in South Yorkshire which has recently been the site of several

futuristic buildings, including several call centres for more than one mobile phone network. According to the local press they have replaced the jobs lost by pit closures and will provide a rosy future for the area after the bleak years of industrial desertification following the enforced closure of heavy industry.

Firstly, let's think about the wages. Before stoppages I, and most other employees in the call centre I work at earn the paltry sum of 750 per month (less than 650 per month take home) which is an annual 9000 per year for a 35 hour week plus five 1 hour long (unpaid) dinner time shifts. Despite all the bourgeois attempts to have us believe that the working class label



only applies to manual labourers, who can seriously claim that clean hands and a computer on a desk are enough to qualify for middle class status with such miserable wages as these? In any case it is not just wages but also relationship to the means of production that defines the working class. In *Revolutionary Perspectives* 23 (second series, Spring 1986) we wrote that the

*the extension of the tertiary (service) sector is the extension of poverty and degradation of working conditions. Far from being a new petty bourgeoisie, such strata are nearer to being a new sub-proletariat.*

Tertiarisation — A Contemporary Myth p.15

It is, as our comrades of *Battaglia Comunista* wrote in 1985, truly a fact that

*All waged workers whose work assumes the form of factory production, i.e. alienated, parcelised and rationalised labour, all these can be said to belong to the working class.*

General Tendencies of Class Composition in *Prometeo* 8 (Fourth Series) p.4

The work itself is one endless repetition. For hours on end we answer calls on a range of issues on customer billing and mobile functions (or lack of them, as they frequently malfunction). The hours crawl by. Einstein developed theories about time and speed: experience has taught me he should have studied time and boredom. It is a wonderful example of the phenomena Marx called alienation. A huge slice of life sold off to capitalists in exchange for little more than survival, sat like a battery hen in front of a computer screen with a headset dealing with dozens of often angry customers. The whole charmless process approaches a bizarre behavioural experiment on wired up primates by insane scientists. Often there is no break between the calls — they come in one after another, sending the mind into a spin then a headache and finally by Thursday or Friday, a numb depression.

Everything is timed and monitored, break times, length of call, length of time the customer is kept on hold, time taken for administrative tasks, everything. Every month newer and higher time saving targets are set, with job insecurity and loss of a (pathetic) bonus of a maximum of 150 per year (don't laugh — its true) being the hidden daggers at one's back to enforce the ever harsher demands. At the same time we are subject to a steady stream of propaganda encouraging loyalty and greater efforts.

Where the all too transparent propaganda fails, (somebody must believe it) managerial personnel in charge of small teams of approximately 15 workers impose the regime. This privileged set of kings of the castle fake orgasmic happiness at being at work (despite the fact that most only earn about 13,000 a year which is enough to set them above the mere customer service advisor, hardly takes them into the ranks of the capitalists with whom they identify). Their hypocrisy is unbelievable. On the one hand we have empathy, understanding, gentle persuasion and sensitivity (which we have to show to the customer) on the other hand, we have bullying,

threatening and constant criticism (which they show to us). Such are social relations under capitalism. Dominated and dominators, masters and slaves. Do as I say, not as I do.

If the recent call centre dispute has revealed the simmering discontent beneath the official image of high tech gloss, garnished with equal opportunity ideology, it quickly becomes apparent that on a daily basis workers resist the situation in a Luddite fashion. "Mistakes" abound, misinformation is given out to customers, mobiles dispatched without the knowledge of unfortunate recipients, callers cut off, customer requests go unactioned etc. Absenteeism is another means of escaping the grind, although this has declined in recent weeks due to a managerial clamp-down involving dismissals and placing repeat offenders on different shift patterns other than those they would "choose". Procedures and systems change with incredible speed, as the elusive perfect system never materialises, as the social nature of the labour flounders due to the apathy, discontent and tiredness of the labourers. (Now called "players", as if the label changed the reality).

Call centre life is an expression of the dead end capitalism offers the working class. The monotonous dreary process, the economic poverty, the subjection to authority structures beyond ones control, the enforced wasting of ones creative life forces to nourish economic powers which exist only to enslave and exploit are a contemporary confirmation of the validity of the Marxist critique of the capitalist mode of production.

In response the working class, whether rotting in unemployment, part time work or mind destroying work like call centre jobs, has to recognise that this really is the best capitalism can offer, that the future will only bring harsher demands and reduced rewards, that even the most ferocious exploitation cannot prevent capitalism sinking further into barbarism and the horror of war. For those who have finally found employment or those moving from even worse job situations, and in the call centre I work in and the area I live in, this is not a small group, one often hears the equivalent of "OK, its crap,

Last Issue:

## **Revolutionary Perspectives**

**15**

**Strikes at Ford  
Electricians' Strikes  
The Disaster is  
Capitalism  
Stalemate in N. Ireland  
East Timor  
Barbarism in the  
Caucasus  
Mass Strike in  
Colombia  
Sylvia Pankhurst  
Iran  
China**



but its better than what I had before" we can say that there is a far superior alternative to martyrdom on the cross of capitalist profits and warfare, that is the communist mode of production which has as its direct aim the improvement of human life rather than the chase for profits to enrich a tiny minority and the elimination of exploitation and domination of one human being by another

For all those who refuse to accept that human society can go no further than the present regime of unemployment, exploitation and poverty, the following extract from the press of our sister organisation, Italian affiliate of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party, the International Communist Party, is an inspiring call to participate in the anti-capitalist struggle, to throw off the dead life which capitalism offers and live in a completely different way, not as dominated, exploited sub-humans, but as fully socialised humans.

*... at the same time the army of the unemployed and excluded increases, together with a multitude of idlers, parasites and servants of capital, whose only interest is certainly not to produce but to consume the surplus value extorted from the workers, the only productive subjects in bourgeois society. The latter, even when capitalism seems to have reduced half an hour or so of their time in the factory, are subjected to increasing weariness, the torment and stress of frantic rhythms of work. The consumption of the overproduction derived from them is denied to them because they do not possess the money to acquire these: part of that overproduction is destined, in the form of useless and damaging luxury goods, to go to the bourgeoisie and their middle class entourage. The conservation of capitalism and the survival of the bourgeois class are therefore tied to the impossibility — excepting the collapse of the entire social and economic system — of subdividing the necessary work at least amongst all the modern*

*slaves of capital, the proletariat, the members of the exploited working class ever more divided into employed (some of the time) and unemployed (all of the time). Capital at the limit of its maximum development is incapable of maintaining all its slaves: it exploits and oppresses hundreds of millions of men, it marginalises and starves all the rest. The reduction of working time by means of legislation within bourgeois society — is presented by reformists and false oppositionists as a real possibility, if spread over time, matching the growing progress of the capitalist economy. But what has happened up to the present day and the perspective emerging in the capitalist world, gives the lie to all those claims. The reduction of labour time at the same level of salary is incompatible with the capitalist mode of production and with the distribution of products commodities resulting from it. Only the struggle to the end with the dominant interests of capital, the class struggle organised and led by the proletarian party, can give life to the demand for the generalised reduction of working time, including in its programme for the future communist society the realisation of such a fundamental objective.*

*The reduction of labour power and the increase of free time will be the result of a superior mode of production and distribution which is communism. The point of departure and arrival will be the end of the class division of society, of bourgeois and proletariat, with the obligation of work for all capable men and women (not more than three hours a day) and the initiation of planned production exclusively designed to satisfy the needs of human society which will allow the full development of every individual and the entire community.*

*"The reduction of working time"*  
(from *Battaglia Comunista*, Nov '97)

Let those whose life revolves around a boring job with poverty pay, those without work or resources and all who recognise the danger with which capitalism menaces humanity recognise the truth which we, and everyday experience, state plainly, there are only two possible directions for humanity the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and all its possibilities for the enrichment of life, or the slide into barbarism and its final solution of World War Or, to finish where Engels finished in his first major work, "War to the palaces, peace to the cottages!" — but then, hopefully, it will be too late for the rich to beware

Ant

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# Nationalisation and Privatisation — Twin Pillars of Capitalism

**T**he continual erosion of wages and working conditions which has accompanied the privatisation of state-owned industry and the process of capital flight to the most profitable areas (otherwise known as globalisation) has provoked a revival of demands for "nationalisation". The Paddington rail disaster, which was primarily due to the greed for profits of both Railtrack and the tram operators (but also the British state) has only added fuel to this demand. But nationalisation is not socialism. It is not even a step towards socialism. It is a capitalist policy designed to save the capitalism from the worst consequences of the system.

When the present capitalist crisis began almost thirty years ago the major Western European countries had all got what was then called "a mixed economy". Some industries were nationalised and some were in private hands. Most of those which were nationalised were to do with basic industries and infrastructure (e.g. coal and railways). In Britain these industries had been taken into state ownership at the end of the Second World War. Pits throughout Britain put up signs saying that these coal mines were now "the property of the people". This was a lie. They were the property of the state, the capitalist state. This state was run by the same combination of capitalists and landowners that had run it for 200 years. What made it easier to keep up the pretence that something really had changed was the fact that the Labour Party was in power (1945-51) and many workers thought that Labour was somehow "socialist". This was yet another lie.

## Myths of Nationalisation

**I**n reality the British economy was in ruins after five years of war. Most of the mines and railways were unprofitable so the Government bought

them at very generous rates from their owners (who thus now had capital to invest in more profitable, newer industries).

Meanwhile "nationalisation" was followed by "rationalisation". In the ten years after nationalisation whole areas of, for example, County Durham, were laid waste by mine closures. The same happened on the railways with the Beeching cuts of 1959-62. 70% of the rail network disappeared. For some this was difficult to explain. If these industries were in the hands of the "people" then why did the people lose their jobs. The answer was because the policy of nationalisation was part of the process of post-war restructuring of the British state and its economy. In this case the state was the only agency with enough capital (based largely on the taxes and contributions of the workers who were later sacked) to carry out the needed cuts.

The myth that Labour was socialist was useful for getting workers to take part in the "democratic process" of the British state. In reality the Labour Party was not only not socialist it only adopted nationalisation to make it more attractive to workers. "Nationalisation" (the famous Clause 4 of the Labour Party constitution) was added in 1918 because Labour leaders feared that they would be deserted by a working class increasingly interested in the Bolshevik Revolution which had succeeded in Russia only months earlier. Labour's pseudo-socialist mask was certainly a factor in keeping the new-born Communist Party in 1921 small (and even fooled Lenin into seeing the Labour Party as an arena in which workers could fight for socialism). When Labour did eventually carry out nationalisation (in Attlee's government after the Second World War) it did so in order to save the capitalists and their state. Even Churchill eventually realised that his own election defeat in July 1945 was a good thing in the long run for the British

state. With many troops on the point of mutiny and many others asking what the Second World War was fought for Labour was the best team to pretend that capitalism had a bright new future to offer. The establishment of the National Health Service, the beginnings of the Beveridge and Keynesian reforms and the nationalisation of the "commanding heights of the economy" all seemed to portend a move towards a new society. In fact Labour was preventing any such move emerging. In the wave of strikes which followed the war the Labour Party were the best capitalist team to use troops to suppress the working class (which they did on at least ten occasions). The trades unions (who then controlled the Labour Party) did their bit too. In return for guarantees of "full employment" they guaranteed that strikes would not threaten the system. British capitalism thus remained backward compared to that in the US or the newly emerging economies in war-devastated Europe and Japan. As result the capitalist crisis which engulfed the whole world hit Britain before the other major capitalist countries.

Throughout the late 60s and early 70s both Labour and Tory tried various policies to begin the restructuring of British industry. In the face of mounting working class hostility the first solution they settled on was more state ownership of industry (steel, for example, was re-nationalised). The printing press worked overtime to try to put money into the system so that workers could be bought off with higher nominal wages. In 1976 however the policy collapsed. The IMF was called in and the Labour Party started to implement the first cuts (which were in the National Health Service) that have gone on ever since. The defeats of the steel workers in 1980 and then the miners in 1985 ensured that the working class was in no position to resist these attacks further. The frontal attack, including increasing



deregulation and privatisation of industry could go full steam ahead

## Globalisation and Privatisation

What the IMF started in Britain (and Italy) in 1976 was the policy that has been pursued ever since. Governments have to stop printing money, balance budgets and create the "right climate" to attract international capital. This involves low private and corporate direct taxation and fewer regulations on environmental, safety and quality issues. At the same time the repressive apparatus of the State has increased to ensure that there will be no social disruption. The "dangerous situation" of the 1970s where every time workers in the electricity generating, rail, coal and steel industries went on strike it

was also a challenge to the state has passed. Now workers strike against a sub-contractor of a monopoly which may have no actual physical presence in a country other than through a finance capital conglomerate.

This internationalisation of capital has split the "Labour Movement". Once again those to the left of Labour are showing that they are the left wing of capital. Most blatant of these is the Socialist Labour Party of Arthur Scargill which puts out anti-European literature to defend "our country" reminiscent of the British National Party. But even the "soft" Trotskyism of the SWP is now calling for the nationalisation or re-nationalisation of rail or coal or any other industry. At first sight the SWP has a confused attitude to nationalisation. They recognised the Stalinist regime in the USSR as "state capitalist" yet today in

Britain they campaign for state control at every turn, from the demonstrations against the WTO to Railtrack. In their campaign against Railtrack on October 16th the *Socialist Worker* call was "Nationalise Rail". The SWP are also campaigning for Ken Livingstone for Labour mayor of London on the grounds that he believes in "public ownership". They are in awkward company as the *Observer* reported on October 24th 1999

*Railtrack bosses have asked the Government to renationalise part of the company in an attempt to free more cash and improve the safety and quality of Britain's antiquated rail network.*

Railtrack already gets a 1.3 billion state subsidy every year (which is more than when it was a nationalised body) but it reckons it needs 28 billion to modernise the rail infrastructure. Asking the

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## Nationalisation and Privatisation

we can see none of this has anything to do with the fight for socialism. And this is why we say that the SWP, Scargill's SLP and all the other Trotskyist organisations are peddling capitalist politics. Under modern capitalist conditions the state acts as the far controller of the national capital. If it needs to nationalise to regenerate accumulation it will. If it has to find other ways to defend the national capital it will. It has to manipulate policies from tariffs to interest rates in order to attract international finance capital. If it can do this then it can steal a march on its rivals. This has nothing to do with socialism as Engels noted over a hundred years ago:

*But the transformation either into joint stock companies or into state ownership does not do away with the capitalistic nature of the productive forces. The modern state no matter what the form is essentially a capitalist machine.*

Anti-Dühring p.329

This was not an isolated observation. Bukharin put it even more clearly:

*The capitalist mode of production is based on the monopoly of the means of production in the hands of the capitalists within the general framework of commodity exchange. There is no difference in principle whether the state power is a direct expression of this monopoly or whether the monopoly is privately organised.*

Imperialism and World Economy (1915) p.157

Nationalisation is actually anti-working class (as is privatisation). They are both designed to raise the profitability of the national capital (in short to put more money into the pockets of the capitalists). However with privatisation the consequences are obvious. Privatisation is a state-sponsored policy to make it easier to carry out wholesale sackings and introduce drastically worse working conditions. In private firms and bit by bit the drive for productivity can be carried out without too much disturbance to the peace of society. The class struggle can be sanitised.

Obviously as revolutionaries we have to fight this. Whether we work in the

public or private sectors we call for workers under attack to organise their own resistance, outside the hands of the unions. We have to go beyond the narrow confines of section, trade and industry that keep the workers divided. Such divisions make it easier for the bosses to make more attacks and impose cuts in jobs and wages.

But what does the SWP do? For a start they accept the capitalist rules of the game — union divisions which already undermine potential struggles

calling for "no to privatisation" immediately excludes workers already in the private sector.

The SWP's seemingly militant demands actually undermines the basis for a genuine collective struggle. Behind it lies the assumption that state control or state ownership are better. Worse still it peddles the idea that state ownership is socialism (and leaves the way open for the lie that Stalinism and the dictatorship of the state is socialism). At its best it smacks of a reformist illusion that nationalisation is a step towards socialism. If the working class actually listened to the SWP's "anti-privatisation" campaign they would end up even more under the heel of the capitalist state. As Engels says it does not matter who owns the property, the private capitalist or the state since the state is the state of the capitalists. This is why we say that no organisation can claim to be socialist if it calls for nationalisation. Nationalisation is a policy resorted to by the capitalist state in this imperialist epoch every time it faces both financial problems and a potentially militant working class. Its aim is to prevent the rise of a revolutionary movement inside the working class. The wave of privatisations are a consequence of the need for more flexible capital and the current state of weakness of the working class.

Socialism is about the abolition of private property not its manipulation. A socialist state will be run and controlled by the working class as a whole through its own elected and recallable bodies. And this is the key. Unless we control the levers of political power any "nationalisation"

(which is not the same as socialisation) will work against us. It will simply be another form of state capitalism.

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*To illustrate the conclusions of the previous article that the choice between nationalisation and privatisation is not the issue for workers, we reproduce here a leaflet distributed in Sheffield during a strike by Housing Benefit workers in March last year*

## United We Fight

The all-out strike by Sheffield's Housing Benefit workers is part of a growing resistance to capital's attacks. For a decade and a half – ever since the defeat of the miners – bosses and governments have been mercilessly hammering the working class. Today our conditions of life and work are infinitely worse.

In the workplace we have suffered not just job losses and direct pay cuts. We've also got to contend with the bosses' attempts to remove all limits to exploitation. In the name of 'flexibility' and 'competitiveness' they've imposed contracts where there's no longer overtime pay for unsocial hours, where fringe benefits are unheard of, where there is no job security. And still they come back for more. On the wider front we hardly need mention the continuing cuts in social services, health, education, pensions.

### Issue Not Privatisation

Clearly this is an offensive against the whole working class. Therefore any fight back should be by the whole working class. So long as workers remain divided shop by shop, factory by factory, sector by sector they are no threat to capital and the bosses. We have to learn the lessons of past mistakes. The number one lesson of the miners' strike is that no matter how valiant and determined, no section of the working class can win on its own. The bosses for their part (not just here, but worldwide) have realised they can ride out pockets of workers' resistance so long as there is no class-wide struggle. So it's crucial to recognise that privatisation is not the issue. Workers in the public sector are facing exactly the same sort of step-up in exploitation as workers elsewhere [Thatcher didn't wait to privatise the mines before she took on the miners.] It makes no difference that the Housing Benefit workers are being attacked

under the banner of privatisation while car workers at Longbridge are under the knife of competitiveness. Fighting under the banner of 'beating privatisation' only helps to keep us divided.

More than ever it is time to follow the old watchword

**ONE CLASS, ONE STRUGGLE.**

### Class Solidarity Not Union Divisions

Once upon a time the trade unions which were built by workers themselves were valuable weapons for workers self-defence. Today, though they are bureaucratic bodies which don't just keep workers divided. The main role of the unions is to quell workers' resistance and find an outcome to struggles acceptable to the bosses. They are all for playing according to the bosses' rules. No 'secondary' picketing, weeks of delays for ballots instead of the direct democracy of mass meetings. They are masters at pretending their own sell-outs are victories. Only 50 redundancies instead of 100, new shift patterns for less money. With the argument that "it's the best we could have got in the circumstances", the unions have worked hand in hand with the bosses to ease in the cuts and depredation of recent years. But the circumstances are that capitalism is facing a global crisis of profitability which has been getting steadily worse for close on 30 years. Throughout the world workers are being told to work harder so that 'their' firm can compete, to accept wage cuts because 'their' country can't afford it, to abandon any idea of a civilised welfare service. Many parts of the globe are already engulfed by barbarism. For those of us in the old capitalist heartlands of Europe this is a warning. There is no future for us under capitalism.

It's not a matter of reforming the unions or building new ones. There are bigger issues at stake. In today's circumstances the only way forward is to extend and unify our struggle beyond every local, sectional and ultimately every national boundary. In today's circumstances the biggest victory for the working class would be to see the formation of a truly international political party ready to turn the every day skirmishes with the bosses into a global fight for the abolition of the wages system.

**For a united fight of all workers whether in the public or private sector. Form workplace assemblies of all workers.**

**Link up with other workers under attack!**



# The Second Congress of the KAPD:

## Resumé

*As there has been a gap in this series of articles on the German Left, we will take the opportunity to go over the content of some of the previous articles.*

**Breaking from German Social Democracy in the First World War** (in RP8). This article traces the further development of the split between the reformists, centrists and revolutionaries in the Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (SPD) which had opened up over the years since the formation of that Party. On the outbreak of the First World War, the reformist wing (in general) turned its back on its earlier fine words about opposing war between capitalist powers. As the war ground on, the proletariat's pressing necessity for the revolutionary wing to constitute a politically independent class party became ever clearer, both internationally and in Germany itself. But, even the Bolshevik revolution failed to push the leading German revolutionaries into founding such a class party (the centrist Unabhängige Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (USPD), was not this party, despite its name - Unabhängig = independent).

**The German November Revolution — A Class Unready** (in RP9). This article looks at November Revolution of 1918, sparked by the refusal of sailors in Kiel to fight a final battle when Germany's war was already lost. This ended the war and opened up a revolutionary situation (and not a revolution — the lack of a revolutionary party being one of the decisive differences between the two). The German bourgeoisie sacrificed their monarchy and used the SPD and the USPD to break the point off the revolutionary movement of the working class. When this failed, the bourgeoisie used the most barbaric force against its enemies. The working class was hampered by the

earlier failure of its leaders to create a party politically independent of the bourgeoisie. This party, the Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (Spartakusbund) (KPD(S)), was eventually founded at the end of 1918 and was immediately put into a situation where its lack of deep roots in the class led to disaster — the so-called Spartakus revolt. In the aftermath of this isolated uprising, which was launched against the advice and votes of the KPD(S), who argued on the grounds of an all-too correct evaluation of the revolt's chances of success. Luxemburg and Liebknecht were murdered along with thousands of workers.

At the founding of the KPD(S), the leadership had been to the right of the membership, and this divergence was accentuated by the conditions of illegality after the uprising, and by pressure from Radek. This led to the formation of a left opposition tendency in the KPD(S), which was expelled at the October 1919 Heidelberg Congress, and was then known as the KPD(Opposition).

**The Kommunistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands (KAPD)** (in RP10). This article deals with the first part of second Congress of the KAPD, later referred to as the real founding Congress of the Party. This was held in the immediate aftermath of the Kapp putsch, an attempt by the German right to take power. Although the putsch was defeated, the forces behind the attempt were not destroyed by the victorious government, but rather unleashed against the working class. Against this background, the Congress had to deal with the bourgeois National Bolshevik minority in its own ranks. Its failure to expel the proponents of this reactionary tendency (instead, they invited the leaders to leave!), exposed the weakness of the majority's conception of a class party.

## The Rest of the Congress Agenda

In the present article, we will look at the remainder of the KAPD's second Congress. This dealt with the Party's position on its own programme, its relations with the Third International and the relationship between the Party and the Betriebsorganisationen (factory organisations — BO's). An extra presentation on the political situation was also given. The Party Programme

Karl Schröder was the main speaker on this topic. Initially, he refused to speak

before the Congress agreed to Berlin's motion that

*The name of the KAPD indicates that the Party stands on the terrain of the conquest of political power and that the Party comprises the best elements.*

However, this attempt to ensure that the context of his speech was not one in which talking at all was pointless ran into the opposition of some of the remaining Hamburg National Bolsheviks (who insisted the revolution is no Party affair), and began to seem rather pointless itself. This was the first fruit of the refusal to formally

expel the National Bolshevik tendency

In the end, Schröder continued with his presentation

His initial point was that the draft programme of the first KAPD Congress had been prematurely presented as the final programme, but for a good reason: the need to demonstrate to the Third International that the KAPD existed on a political basis, not just because they had been thrown out of the KPD(S).

The presentation continued by giving Schröder's view of the Party as a creation of the bourgeois epoch



Formally, this position is identical with the Hamburg view, but Schröder showed that he grasped this undoubted truth in a dialectical fashion. It is true that parties will disappear with capitalism, but the disappearance of capitalism is a process, in which the revolution itself is just the most important stage. Even after the revolution, it will still be necessary for the vanguard of the proletariat to lead the way towards a new form of social organisation. To do this, the vanguard must organise itself to take care of "the tasks of the moment" (as Schröder puts it), it must be a Party. From this, however, it seems clear that Schröder, at least, had the same position on this question as does the IRRP, provided that "the tasks of the moment" was intended to include military and organisational tasks, and not just educational/propaganda tasks.

Schröder then says that the "council idea" is at the heart of the programme. However, his conception appears to be very idealist, in that he says that the "council idea is the absolute and complete negation of capitalist society and of capitalist ideology." The problem is that an idea cannot, by itself, negate a society. It is necessary for the idea to result in a practice which can deliver what the old society cannot, at least in the long term. The communist practice is production for need instead of things being produced to satisfy the bourgeoisie's thirst for profit, the producers themselves will evaluate social needs and direct production to satisfy those needs.

To carry out the transition from a post-revolutionary society to a communist society, workers' councils, or something like them, are indispensable, so that workers gain the confidence and experience necessary to act as the subject of history and not just as one factor acted on by the economy. This is not to say for one moment that councils cannot be counter-revolutionary, but only that without revolutionary councils a revolution cannot reach its goal. Many reactionary workers' councils have appeared in the course of history, including in Germany. These councils saw their rôle as introducing bourgeois democracy, prior to their own

dissolution, rather than destroying the bourgeois state and constituting themselves a proletarian one.

Although the possibility that steps (such as tactical retreats), necessary for the final goal, could be made without councils cannot be ruled out, the existence of revolutionary councils is a pre-condition for the final success of the revolution.

The problem with attributing magical properties to the council idea is that it leaves open the door to councilism, which dispenses with the Party.

Schröder then rejects the nationalist (and racist) approach of the Laufenberg and Wollfheim tendency, the key to the situation of the German proletariat is not an alliance with the bourgeoisie, but a German revolution against the German bourgeoisie, which would free the Russians from the need to obey the necessities imposed on them by their situation.

It is true, Schröder maintained that the Russians are interfering in an unjustified manner in the affairs of the German Parties, but the International should not be rejected for this reason. This would be an overreaction to things which can be refused individually. Those that complain that the "old" leadership methods should be abandoned are formally correct, but they often only camouflage their own desire to be small princes in their own domains by an absolute rejection of the concept of leadership. What is needed is the replacement of the conception of the masses as an unthinking cadaver by the idea of the masses as the class-conscious proletariat united by socialism. This has as a consequence a new conception of leadership: a leadership which brings fire to the masses, enlivening their consciousness, rather than dancing on their backs, a leadership whose actions will be transparent to the masses.

However, by its nature, this agenda item covers too many points to be further treated here, and some of these points are anyway dealt with elsewhere. We wish to move onto the next point, and will only observe that the Congress

passed the task of amending the draft to a subcommittee composed of members of the Berlin KAPD.

## The KAPD Position vis-à-vis the Third International

The main speaker on this point was Franz Jung of Berlin.

He first stated that the International was founded primarily because of the pressing need of the Russian comrades for such a body, and thus, even the Russians themselves now admitted. And the present Congress of the Third International was a result of the Russians requiring the adhesion of the proletariat for the same reasons behind the original foundation of the International. Many of the parties present in Moscow had been founded by travelling representatives of the International, and many of them had very limited memberships.

Moreover, amongst the various German Parties, the movement towards the Third International had more to do with the degeneration of the Second International than with the perceived merits of the Third.

Nevertheless, according to Jung, there were actually two Third Internationals: the International shaped by Karl Radek (the Russian CP's leading representative in the Third International, a pioneer of the "theft" of National Bolshevism from the Hamburg tendency), which was a dependency of the Soviet Republic, and the International which was opening within Radek's one, which was the real proletarian International which has the task of determining the tactical guidelines conforming with the overall goal, the establishment of a proletarian dictatorship. The contradiction between the two would be resolved by the conflict between the Parties coming from the same countries (e.g., that between the KAPD and KPD(S)).

Jung continued by describing the difficulties caused by the "Radek" International for the "real" International. Nevertheless, he concluded that there really was no alternative to remaining in the Third



International forming a block of organisations opposed to the International would mean working with people who had no idea what proletarian organisation was, and this was especially so as even the IWW was working with the International. Jung then put forward the bizarre idea that the KAPD should have merely declared that it stood on the same ground as the Third International when this was founded, rather than actually asking to join it (thus sacrificing any possibility of influencing Communists in other countries, for the sake of not having to defend KAPD "autonomy").

But now the KAPD was in the International, it was necessary to use the forthcoming Congress of the International to report on the German situation as it really was, and so prove to the Russian comrades that the politics of the KPD(S) were false.

Jung remarked that the other parties were making progress in the development of their consciousness, and gave the example of the Norwegian party. The main point, however, was that Germany was the site of the next stage of the world revolution. Russia had some weaknesses, the major one being that the proletariat there was insufficient to support the revolutionary apparatus. For this reason, Jung remarked, the Russian revolution had been "a typical putsch[!]", and the Red Army was held together by propaganda alone.

Here Jung was approaching the councilist position that the Russian October had not been a proletarian revolution at all, but merely a bourgeois *coup d'état*.

In his conclusion, Jung reiterated that the most important task of the International was now to give the German revolution, as the next stage in the World revolution, its full support.

At this point, Jan Appel forcefully demanded to speak, provoked by Jung's proto-councilist views on Russia. Jung of Berlin had, Appel said, departed from the truth in his exposition of how things stood in Russia. Appel's demand was acceded to, and Appel rejected the idea that the Russian revolution was a putsch. Rather, it was the culmination of a process which had

already been underway in 1905. The Bolsheviks had given expression to the will of the working class, and the result of the revolution was that the working class had seized power and still maintained that power.

However, in Russia, there was, out of necessity, an energetic domination of the movement by its leadership. As a consequence of this, Appel maintained, the Russians wished to spread similar organisational forms to the whole of the world communist movement. But the tactical confrontation between the KAPD and the KPD(S) was about the contradiction between leadership and a mass movement. The proletariat, according to Appel, had no need of leaders, and political clarity demanded that the KAPD remained with the worldwide movement against leaders.

When the debate was thrown open to the floor, delegate D of Kiel put forward the idea that a proletarian International with an Executive Committee with powers over national tactics was premature, as even the bourgeois had not centralised itself internationally. The International had been in existence from the first moment that workers from different countries had acted together, but its General Staff emerges from below, not from above. The Russian conception of leading the masses might be correct for Russia, but it was not right internationally. If the KAPD's entrance into the International was denied, this did not matter as the KAPD was part of the International and this would approach the KAPD eventually. What the KAPD should have done was to propose the expulsion of the KPD(S), on the basis of its loyalty to the German bourgeoisie.

Schröder spoke next. Firstly, he paid his respect to the achievements of the Russian proletariat, and then pointed out that the delegation to the Third International had been instructed to call for the expulsion of the KPD(S). Schröder then put his position on the International. For him, the International consists of the co-operation of all proletarian organisations, whether parties or not, with the aim of completely destroying the capitalist system and establishing a classless society. Such an International must be

imbued with the idea of increasing proletarian activity and this can only be done if the International satisfies certain preconditions. The first is that the International stands on the terrain of unconditional class struggle. This means that the interests of the proletariat are put before everything else, both on an international and national level.

The second condition was that the International is for the dictatorship of the proletariat. This means that the proletariat desires a total domination over economics and politics in order to annihilate the class enemy.

Thirdly, the International must recognise the council idea, that the councils are the process which leads the proletariat to the classless society by developing proletarian consciousness.

Schröder then turned to the question of how things were with the present International, and how the International of the future should be. The present International was dominated by the Russians as they had made the revolution and were at the point of the international class struggle. In the future, the International would be based on the councils. The phase that the KAPD found itself in was a transitional one between the present International and the future one. In this transitional phase, the organisations in each country had to decide their own tactics on the basis of the tenets of socialism, and, if the Russians attacked this, the KAPD would nevertheless have to keep its eye on the tasks of the day. Schröder finished by emphasising that the aim of the International was not a free federation of nations, but of a humanity united in a classless society.

At the end of the debate, there were several motions to be put to the vote. The motions that were neither successful nor were contained in the successful ones, were one put forward by Frankfurt am Main, which demanded that the International judge the KAPD by its revolutionary activity alone, that the International itself should be defined by its activity and not its resolutions and stated that the International was not just in Moscow.



and Petersburg, but everywhere where the class struggle presented itself in a sharpened form, with the goal of defeating world capital, and one presented by Hamburg, which sought to reduce the International to a post-box and to reduce its aims to a free federation of nations. This resolution also accused the International of trying to make Germany a border state of Russia.

The motion on this question which was finally adopted was

*The regular Congress of the KAPD recognises the Communist International as the union of the revolutionary workers of all countries who are fighting for the dictatorship of the proletariat. The KAPD will struggle according to the basic principles of the Communist International, in so far as these rest on the recognition of class struggle, the proletarian dictatorship and the council idea. Its tactical position will be determined by the evaluation of the revolutionary situation in Germany.*

*For this reason, it fundamentally rejects the interference of the executive bodies of the Communist International in the internal affairs of the Party.*

*The KAPD strives for the union of all the revolutionary proletarians of Germany in common action. It is eager to create, on the basis of its principles, and by going over the heads of leadership cliques, a community of action with the fighting proletariat which will grow in the struggle itself.*

*The KAPD will turn to its brother Parties adhering to the Communist International with an address. At the same time, it will report on the revolutionary situation in Germany and lay down guidelines for the organisational basis of the Communist International, which correspond to the present significance of the revolutionary struggles for the extension of the World revolution.*

(proposed by M -Leipzig, Th. Occupied Zone and Schröder)

This was supplemented by a resolution on the Rühle affair

*The Congress rejects with indignation the demand by the Executive Committee [of the Communist International] that the KAPD should expel comrade Rühle from the organisation. It declares its solidarity with Otto Rühle and denies the EC any right of interference in the internal organisation of the KAPD. The Congress sees in this interference the outrageous propaganda activity of the Spartakusbund.*

(proposed by Pf -Gotha)

When this resolution was adopted, the North and North-West areas abstained, saying that comrades Laufenberg and Wolfheim were not mentioned in it, although they had been named by the International's EC alongside Rühle. M. Leipzig clarified the position of the majority: the EC's concerns about Laufenberg and Wolfheim were justified, but those over Rühle were ~~not~~

During the debate, it was felt that an appeal to the proletariat was needed. A group of comrades produced this by the end of the Congress. Its text is produced as an appendix to this article

## Unions and Unionen

In German, "trades' union" has the translation (*gewerkschaft* (plural *Gewerkschaften*). Confusingly (at least for English speakers!), the German Left (anarcho-syndicalists as well as communists) chose to baptize an alternative movement to the *Gewerkschaften* as *Unionen* (singular *Union*). Here, we will use the German words to denote the two concepts: *Gewerkschaft*, and the alternative, *Union*. The *Unionen* attempted to unite the factory organisations, the BO's.

The BO movement had its roots in the collaboration of the *Gewerkschaften* with the war effort. When the revolution broke out, the proletariat perceived the need for an alternative to the *Gewerkschaften*.

The Congress started by listening to a presentation by Kuschewski of Berlin, who represented the *Allgemeine*

*Arbeiter-Union* (General Workers' Union)

In this presentation Kuschewski described how the *Union* movement consisted of two strands: the AAU, which united the most advanced proletarians on the terrain of the proletarian dictatorship, and the syndicalist *Freie Unionen* (FU), whose dominant fraction rejected political action, often rejected the use of violence, and wanted each BO to be fully autonomous. Kuschewski wanted the KAPD to reject the FU and to instruct its members to join the AAU, in order to fully win the AAU workers to communism and to give the KAPD a weapon in the struggle. The question of the dissolution of the KAPD into the AAU to form a unitary organisation was, for Kuschewski, something which would eventually happen, but not now, and not under the dictatorship of the proletariat.

After this presentation, a discussion was held. H. Leipzig complained that Kuschewski's presentation may have correctly described the AAU, but it greatly exaggerated the differences between the AAU and the FU. He said that many FU members were not syndicalists and that his district worked closely with the FU.

Sp. Rhineland, on the contrary, complained that the FU was hampering the work of his district. It was necessary, in his opinion, to draw a line of separation between the KAPD and the syndicalists. On the other hand, the idea of communist work in the *Union* was an impossibility, as the leadership often lay in the hands of the USPD.

Pf. Gotha complained that Sp. Rhineland had misunderstood. It was not a question of the members of the BO's joining the Party, but vice-versa. The KAPD did not want to take over the BO's as an end in itself, but to use them as a means to organise propaganda for the forward march of the revolution. The aim was to unite proletarians in the revolutionary BO's and so it was the task of the KAPD to propagate revolutionary communist ideas inside the BO's.

Pf. Gotha also pointed out that many syndicalist workers were in advance of those of the SPD and USPD and that it



was important to point out to them that they stood on false ground

H-Dresden acknowledged that the BO's were now the backbone of the Party. In Dresden, the experience of the Rhinelanders had not materialised and the Dresdeners were evolving the correct tactics in the struggle of the *Union with the Gewerkschaften*. There could be no compromise with the FU, but, at the same time, it should be made possible for the FU to be absorbed by the AAU. It was also important to refute the allegations that the KAPD and Rühle were anarchists and syndicalists

Th-Occupied Zone said that the KAPD ex members who had caught the syndicalist sickness were lost to the movement as they rejected violence. On the other hand, those syndicalists who had been drawn into action with the KAPD had left the basis of their own platform, without realising it. They should be told this, but a blurring of the dividing lines between the KAPD and syndicalism should be decisively rejected

H-Hamburg showed the councilist side of the Hamburg tendency. He rejected any special propaganda work in the BO's, as they were already on the ground of the council idea (which is *not enough*)

During this discussion, the following resolution had been proposed by Ihlau (Berlin)

*The Congress expects the Party members to leave the Gewerkschaften. The Congress places itself without reservation on the ground of the Betriebsorganisation, united in the Allgemeine Arbeiter-Union.*

This resolution was adopted with the proviso that it be further discussed by the districts. Spandau-Osthavelland and Pomerania declared that they could not support the resolution as many of their members were syndicalists<sup>(1)</sup> or members of the FU

Clearly, the KAPD was very far from being homogeneous on the question of the *Unionen*, both with regard to the facts of the case and, more importantly, the theoretical framework for those facts. A theoretical

framework allows revolutionaries to come to conclusions even where the local situations are, in fact, varied. For us, organisations linked to particular struggles *can* be in the interests of the proletariat, but permanent mass organisations must always be recuperated by capitalism, even if they have roots in struggle organisations. All proletarian experience subsequent to the post World War I revolutionary wave has shown this. The only way a struggle organisation can survive as a proletarian organisation is if it loses its character as an organisation grouping workers of all political tendencies to become an organisation *based on* proletarian politics. In that case, it must develop a positive relationship to the Party.

It may be the case that the BO's, or some of them, constituted such organisations, but it is also necessary that the Party's attitude to them be based on these principles. At best, only certain currents of the KAPD conformed to this concept of relations with extra-Party organisations, while other currents were semi-syndicalist or syndicalist, or semi-councilist

## Business Report

**B**efore listening to the final presentation, on the political situation, the Congress dealt with organisational and other matters. The business report contains some interesting material with regard to the strength of the Party. The speaker (R. Berlin) claimed that, despite the KPD(S) have access to many more practised speakers and much more money, the KAPD had taken about 75% of the membership of the old Party, leaving the KPD(S) strong in only Chemnitz and Stuttgart. A regional breakdown of the situation of the KAPD revealed that the strongest area of the Party was Berlin. In the Rhineland and in Central Germany, despite the repression, the Party organisation had been rebuilt and was again vigorous. In Saxony-Anhalt the Party organisation was in the process of healing after some individuals had been excluded, but in Silesia the Party had no members at all. In Southern Germany, some sections of the old KPD had joined the new Party, and Feuerbach, in particular, had

been growing, but these had left as a result of the Laufenberg-Wolffheim tendency

In the North-Western region only Wilhelmshaven was healthy. Bremen was close to collapse, partially as a result of trying to hold meetings addressed by Laufenberg and Wolffheim. These meetings had dissolved in uproar, and the Party had lost roughly 1500 Marks

Hamburg had always claimed to have 5000 to 8000 members, but only 2000 really existed. Of these 2000, only 400 or 500 actually attended meetings. The workers had deserted the Party because of the theories of Laufenberg and Wolffheim and precisely the same thing would happen elsewhere if these theories were adopted

## The Political Situation

**T**his too is translated as an appendix. This article will be concluded in a later issue, when the evaluation of the political situation will be judged against the events

## Appendix I:

### Appeal to the Proletariat of Germany

Workers' Class comrades! The lance of the raging and united attacks by World capital and its accomplices against Soviet Russia has been broken by the annihilating defeat of Poland and by the victorious advance of the Red Army towards India and to the Black Sea. The next effect of World capital's will to destroy is the systematic organisation of White Terror. In Hungary and Poland, in America and India, the beast of this White Terror is pausing. In Germany, the will to destroy has found its expression in the disarmament law. This disarmament law means the legal establishment of White Terror, on the orders of Entente capital with the agreement of the German bourgeoisie, in order to be able to club the revolutionary proletariat to the ground. Only the revolutionary proletariat and not the bourgeoisie will feel the barbs of the exceptional law



Don't be fooled by those who want you to believe that the disarmament of the reaction must be preceded by the disarmament of the proletariat, because the disarmament of the revolution [should be reaction!] can only be the work of the revolution. Therefore the slogan must be: Workers, don't deliver yourselves to reaction without a fight!

World capital is readying itself for the decisive battle between capital and labour, it is making the preparations for the complete annihilation of revolutionary thought and will. Over everything there stands as a flaming warning for the proletariat the words of the *Communist Manifesto*: Either communism or barbarism.

The eyes of our Russia brothers, of the proletarians of all countries, are upon us, the proletariat of Germany. Germany is the strongest bulwark of world reaction and is therefore the key to world revolution. Let us be aware of our world historical task!

The Treaty of Versailles, Spa, the disarmament law and the rest are only the preparations for the most decisive blow against the proletariat. Recognising this means to understand the present tasks of the proletariat. Tighter and more oppressively capital is pulling the noose around the neck of the proletariat. Let us tear it apart, before it strangles us!

Not protest rallies and resolutions, but deeds are the order of the day! Away with compromises and tactics in negotiations! Away with theoretical hairsplitting. There can be no agreement. The slogan is struggle. Away with the fetters of wage slavery.

We must shake off our inactivity. We want the arrogance born of power of a small clique of owners no more! The complete annihilation of the bourgeois/capitalist economic and social mode of existence is and must be the aim of our struggle. Only on the ruins of the old world can the new coming world of communism come into being.

The hour of decision nears. Prevent the annihilating blows of World capital! Form a block with the pioneers of the World revolution. Fight shoulder to shoulder with your class comrades, not for the interests of a party, but for

communism, which does not correspond to the wishes of a party, but to the interests of the World proletariat. For the dictatorship of the proletariat! For the Communist International! For the council system! Against servitude and tyranny! Forwards to the liberation of humanity! At stake is the future of the working class. To Action! Long live the World Revolution!

## Appendix II:

### The Political Situation (Alexander Schwab, Berlin)

The appeal which you have just approved already describes the political situation. The political situation is presently best characterised by clearly realising that the bourgeoisie is split into two contesting fractions. And this is so not only in Germany, but also in the camp of the Entente. The first is the fraction to which the militarists and heavy industrialists belong, which arms the reaction and stands for the maintenance of the residents' misère, taking its mood from the Hungarian events. In England, this is the weaker fraction which wants to give Poland military aid. The leading power among the bourgeoisie which is battle-ready is the French bourgeoisie, and precisely because it sees itself threatened by an economic and financial collapse, because it has no more time to wait upon the peaceful methods of the English fraction. The other fraction is that which in England is represented by Lloyd George and in Germany by the Democratic Party. It is the direction which believes it can once again deal with the problem of the day, the World Revolution, through negotiations. This fraction, which still has time for such negotiations and ways of behaving, is therefore led by the English bourgeoisie, which is much less threatened by the collapse of the Western European economy. You could almost believe that our German Centre Parties are serious in the neutral application of the disarmament law, that they really would like to disarm both sides and participate in the English

affair in Russia. But it must be clear that this fraction cannot win in the long run, and precisely because they have nothing to fight with. The material means of fighting are in the hands of the extreme right, whereas the mass action tool of struggle lies in the hands of the working class. This fraction of negotiators must be worn away in the struggle between the real powers. Support for the reactionary fraction is, in the main, localised in Hungary, Bavaria and East Prussia. Starting from Bavaria and Hungary they will try to create a reactionary block to crush Austria. The situation there is exactly the opposite to ours, where in the course of time a revolutionary block will be created which will crush the third reactionary outpost, the Polish nobility and the Polish bourgeoisie. One of the key areas is necessarily Upper Silesia, for only on its basis will the economic power be found which is necessary for the conduct of every war. On the other hand, as far as the Western coal fields are concerned, it must be assumed that they will fall into the hands of the reaction. The midday edition of today's paper carries a credible report according to which the Polish preparations for "aid for Poland" have been undertaken and a mass of railworkers has been assembled at the border, as they are naturally assuming that in Germany the railworkers will resist the transport of French troops through Germany. They want to break this resistance by using their own workers. For this reason, we must assume that the French bourgeoisie will soon push forward, because their situation forces them to look for a rapid solution, and that we will have the reactionary struggle brought into the country from the West.

Our internal situation is, on the contrary, focussed on the question of the disarmament law. I would be happy if we still had time to stage a great manoeuvre against the law, but we do not have time for this. It would be better if we did. For I don't believe that our organisation is sufficiently prepared for the economic and military struggle for us to take up the struggle with a good conscience and a clear belief in success. It would be better, I believe, if we could focus interest on the disarmament action and could then see



where the hidden weaknesses of our organisation were, where things could be improved, so that we could be in the position to bring the USPD masses to us. We must keep our eye open, so that we do not miss any phase pass by in which we could, through direct connections with the proletariat, make clear the inhibitions and betrayals of the USPD leaders. We already know that this will happen and we are tying the masses ever more tightly to our slogans. If we think of the possibility of a reactionary action from the West being carried into the country, we must also think for a moment of a second danger: the danger of a nationalist intoxication, which could, under certain circumstances, pass through the country. We can be sure that the militarists will try all sorts of things. The politics of the reactionary papers are clearly those of preparation for an alliance with Russia against the West. The interests of the militarists are completely clear in following a line, and this line can only be carried out, if they succeed in confusing our thoughts, so that the masses are drawn into a common fight with Russia against the West, but under the leadership of reactionary militarists. This is a real danger which we must not underestimate. Germany does not consist of industrial cities alone. In the open countryside nationalist ideology is still deeply rooted. There would be a swarm of volunteers from the countryside. We must be prepared for this danger and stop this situation from being used by the old ruling caste to put itself in the saddle again. The Hamburg tendency is a most dangerous contribution to these reactionary politics.

It remains the fact that piecemeal actions are one of the greatest dangers for the proletariat. It is an ancient basic tenet of the militarists to strike down the first unit that marches, before it can form an army. This theory is indelible in the bone of our reaction and it is clear that they will act according to it. The slogans of the day must also be clear, so that the enemy only comes up against an undivided front and never find the opportunity of knocking out groups one by one. This question of centralism must not be considered as

before, but only from this purely practical standpoint. I believe that, if we do not march forwards too quickly or too slowly in the coming struggles, we can arrive at our first goal. May our next Congress fall in a much more difficult situation, one where we must defend what we have won. [Applause]

D-East Prussia complemented the presentation by describing the situation in East Prussia. As elsewhere in Germany, the workers in East Prussia are also expecting action in the immediate future. Even in circles of the *Gewerkschaften*, the opinion is often found that the proletariat faces the final showdown. The workers are

determined to resist disarmament to the utmost.

## Note

1 The information in this article is taken from "Protokoll des 1. ordentlichen Parteitag der kommunistischen Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands vom 1. bis 4. August 1920 in Berlin" ("Protocols of the First Regular Congress of the KAPD 1st-4th August 1920, Berlin"), published and supplied with a foreword by Clemens Klockner, Verlag für wissenschaftliche Publikationen, 1981. Unfortunately, many of the participants are referred to only by their initials and district.

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## Chechen War

# The Caucasus — Imperialism's New Battleground

The last months of 1999 brought an intensification of Russia's new war in the Caucasus and with it enormous loss of life, displacement of civilians and widespread destruction. At least 10 000 people have already been killed, 200,000 turned into refugees and infrastructure, towns and cities razed to the ground by bombing and artillery. This is the second war which Russia has fought in Chechnya since the breakup of the USSR in 1991 and is proving just as barbaric as the first in which 100,000 people were killed.

The Russian strategy in the present war is however different from that of the first war in that there is less concern for the Chechen population and infrastructure. Massive bombing, rocket and artillery attacks on both civilian and military targets precede infantry assaults. New weapons such as laser guided bombs and vacuum bombs, which collapse the lungs of those in the area, are being used for the first time. This strategy, which is copied from that followed by NATO in Yugoslavia, is designed to limit Russian casualties. However, the casualties are mounting and though the war is clearly being fought in a way designed to sustain the power of the Moscow elite, the quick war they promised is simply not happening.

## The War is Imperialist

Despite the tangled web of lies spun by both Moscow and the US, the fundamental reasons for this new war are not Chechen self-determination, elimination of terrorism, suppression of Islamic fundamentalism or even the more plausible explanation of bolstering the Moscow ruling clique. The fundamental cause of the present war is the imperialist need to control the gas and oil production of the

Caucasus, the Caspian sea and the rich gas and oil fields which lie in the lands to the east and north east of the Caspian. The war is an imperialist one and ultimately the forces opposing each other are Russia and the USA. The war is part of a wider process which has been taking place since the collapse of the USSR a decade ago, the process of the reformation of imperialist blocs. This means that the interests of the European Union are also directly involved.

## Russian Aims

The main events leading to the new war clearly indicate that Russia's principal concerns lie in the production, transport and control of the oil from this region. The first Chechen war ended with the Khasavyurt peace agreement which allowed for Russian repair and reopening of the Chechen section of the pipeline from Baku to Novorossiysk. This pipeline is extremely important to Russia. Not only does the Russian pipeline monopoly "Transneft" earn transit fees of up to \$300 million annually from this line, its successful operation will determine routes of future oil and gas pipelines. The pipeline was reopened in October 1997, but the Chechens, who following the first war had achieved a de-facto independence, demanded a greater share of the transit income than the Russians were prepared to give them. Russia then began a series of moves to eliminate the need to deal with Chechnya at all. Work on a new pipeline by-passing the Chechen section of the pipeline via Daghestan was started and at the same time Moscow constructed both a new railway linking the Daghestan capital, Mahachkala to the Russian rail network, and new power lines connecting Daghestan directly to the Russian power grid. Both these last two measures eliminated the need to

use existing links, which passed through the Chechen capital Grozny and, of course, enabled power and rail links to Chechnya to be cut without affecting Daghestan and Azerbaijan. The Chechens responded by siphoning oil from the pipeline and finally by sabotaging it. Transneft was forced to close the pipeline in June 99 because of what it described as "attacks by Chechen bandits." The by-pass pipeline was not complete so Russia proceeded to transport oil by rail through Daghestan thereby by-passing the Chechen section of the pipeline and depriving the Chechens of any income from the line whatsoever. In August Chechen fighters entered Daghestan and declared the whole Caucasus region an independent Islamic state. This move, of course, cut the rail route and effectively undermined Russian attempts to by-pass Chechnya and fulfil its contracts to Azerbaijan oil companies. It was this move, which provoked the all out war with Chechnya. Although the terrorist bombings of flats in Moscow and other cities in September which killed over 300 Russian workers provided the pretext and ideological justification for the war they were not the cause of the war. There is considerable doubt over whether the Chechens were even responsible for these bombings. The claim that it was the Russian security forces who planted the bombs is entirely credible (see *Revolutionary Perspectives* 15).

The Baku/Novorossiysk pipeline is the first of a number of new oil and gas pipelines, which are due to be constructed through the area. A new pipeline is required for the Caspian oil fields since the existing pipeline is far too small to take the future production, a new pipeline is required from the Tengiz oil fields in Kazakhstan and a gas pipeline is needed from the Turkmenistan gas fields to Europe. Flows of oil and gas are set to increase



dramatically in the next decade. The "early" Caspian oil, for example, which is due for the next two years will be approximately 20 million tonnes annually but the main oil is expected to be over 70 million tonnes per year. Transit fees alone could be billions of dollars. Russia, of course, wishes to route all the new pipelines through its territory and so gain both the income and the control which this will bring. All these projects are threatened by the anarchy in Chechnya and Transneft's inability to keep the existing pipeline operating. If Russia cannot control events in Chechnya, which is part of its own territory, her ability to influence what happens in the three independent republics to the south, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Armenia, will vanish. Pipelines will be routed elsewhere.

### US Aims

The US is trying to exclude Russian influence from the whole area and eliminate any possibility of Russia rebuilding its ability to challenge the US. It is attempting to prise the southern Caucasian republics out of the Russian sphere of influence and to route all future pipelines through its client states. US and European capital have been pouring into the oil fields of the area and already one new pipeline bypassing Russian territory has been built. This is the new line from Baku, which runs via Georgia to the Georgian black sea port of Supsa, which started operation in April. A further pipeline linking Baku to the Mediterranean and running along a route through Georgia and Turkey to the Turkish port of Ceyhan is planned. During the OSCE conference in Istanbul in November, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey and Kazakhstan took some time off to sign the accords for this pipeline, and the US signed as a witness and promised some funding. In addition the framework for a gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to Turkey was agreed.

Bill Richardson, the US ambassador to the UN had bluntly stated the US position a year earlier,

*At stake is far more than the fate of the complex Caspian region itself. Rivalries being played out here will have a decisive impact in shaping the post communist world, and in determining how much influence the US will have over its development. This is about US energy security, which depends on diversifying our sources of oil and gas world-wide. It is also about preventing strategic inroads by those who don't share our values.*



*We are trying to move the newly independent countries toward the West. We would like to see them reliant on Western commercial and political interests rather than going another way. We've made a substantial political investment in the Caspian, and it's very important to us that both the pipeline map and the politics come out right.*

Things have been coming out right for the US and if Russia does not achieve a decisive victory in Chechnya her influence on production and transport of the region's oil will be dramatically reduced. If the US chooses to stoke up the war in Chechnya Russia could find herself in another Afghanistan, and the US has ample ability to do this. It is freely admitted that the US's ally Saudi Arabia is funding and arming the Chechen fighters and re-supply could easily be continued through Georgia. The US position, as often occurs in imperialist rivalry, is somewhat

contradictory. On the one hand they want Russian influence removed from the Caucasus and so want Russia to lose or at least become entrapped in an open ended conflict, while on the other had the US wants to preserve the power of the Yeltsin/Putin gang who started the war and who's future depends on its success.

Russia is, however, unlikely to accept Afghanisation of this war and could intervene in Georgia if the republic becomes a transit for re-supplying the Chechen guerillas. All three of the independent southern Caucasian republics have internal wars in which

the larger imperialist powers could intervene to disrupt the plans of their rivals. Georgia, for example, has an internal conflict with the Abkhazis who occupy the northern Black Sea region of the country. Russia has, in fact, already been intervening in this area. It has supported Ossetian separatists against Georgia and is behind attempts to assassinate the country's president Eduard Shevardnadze.

Russia has recently warned Georgia about allowing Chechens free passage across its border and lifted its own blockade on Abkhazia. Georgia, for its part, has expressed its determination to join NATO. Though NATO is unlikely to integrate Georgia for the present, the threat which this would pose to Russia is obvious. Armenia and Azerbaijan have a long standing and bitter territorial dispute over the Nagorno Karabakh region of Nagorno Karabakh recently patched up by the USA in an attempt to get its pipeline from Baku through there to Ceyhan in Turkey. Russia could again intervene in this to foul up that project.

The scene is thus already set for a long and bloody imperialist conflict in the Caucasus, and if the US decides to go down this road such a conflict will occur. The US has already shown its aggressive intentions through the eastwards extension of NATO, which now includes 3 former Warsaw Pact

countries, and its intervention in Yugoslavia. The Kosovo war showed that the Monroe doctrine is now being applied to Europe, namely that the US will not hesitate to intervene militarily in Europe when it is in its interests to do so irrespective of international law. The intervention in the Balkans is a trial run for intervention elsewhere and the Caucasus could be next. The Kosovo war seriously alarmed not only Russia itself but many of the ex-USSR states. Some, such as Belarus, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have rejoined the Confederation of Independent States (CIS), the umbrella grouping for the ex-USSR republics, and others such as Ukraine, Moldova and Uzbekistan are in discussions on rejoining. They are, in simple terms, looking to Russia for their defence. These factors have stiffened the Russian resolve in Chechnya and now there is no going back.

## US and the European Union

The US has a further objective, the prevention of the formation of a rival European bloc. The US intervention in the Balkans demonstrated that the US is the only power capable of forcing settlements of conflicts anywhere in the world, including Europe, and that the US will be the arbiter in Europe for some time to come. However differences with the EU are becoming clearer and throwing the European powers together.

The EU is just as eager as the US to get its hands on the oil of the Caucasus and there is already massive European investment in the area. The Azerbaijan International Oil Company (AIOC) which is behind the pipeline from Baku to Supsa in Georgia has as its leading company the merged UK and US oil giants BP-Amoco, however, the EU does not wish the US to dominate the Caucasian oil supplies. EU interests have already clashed with those of the US further south in Iran where the US tried to prevent the EU oil companies getting their hands on Iranian oil. The fact that European capital has been going into Iranian oil fields has infuriated the US which has banned its companies from investing in Iran and

sought to extend this ban to the EU. The EU would also be happy with less expensive pipeline routes through Iran rather than Turkey, and the US is determined to prevent this.

The US has been pushing Turkey forward as its client in the Caucasus. Turkey, which has already reaped rewards from cooperation with the US over Iraq and Israel stands to gain from having pipelines routed through its territory. It also has a long standing imperialist rivalry with Russia in the Caucasus and is only too happy in ejecting Russian influence. While the EU has for over a decade rejected Turkey's application for membership it is significant that this is now being reconsidered. EU membership could draw Turkey away from its position as US agent and towards the EU and its ambitions.

There are now sections of the European bourgeoisie who understand the need to move towards greater political and military unity if their interests are to be realized against those of the US, and the EU is slowly moving in that direction. Certain sections of the European bourgeoisie would accordingly be happy to see a Russian victory in Chechnya. It is thus no longer a question of the West opposing Russia. The West is itself no longer united. If Russia achieves a victory in Chechnya it will be for this

## The Working Class and the War

As always occurs in this epoch, it is the working class who are mobilised as cannon fodder for the bourgeois armies, and it is the working class who are the main victims of their wars. Why is the bourgeoisie able, at the end of the twentieth century, to mobilise Russian and Chechen workers behind the banners of Russian chauvinism, Chechen nationalism and Islamic reaction when these things are so clearly against their interests?

The answer lies in the fact that the working class still lacks consciousness of itself as a class historically uniquely capable of ending capitalist society and

creating communism. This is why it lacks a communist political party to fight for its interests encapsulated in the communist programme. The fact that the bourgeoisie needs to mobilise workers behind its banners and march them off to slaughter each other is not only an indication of the domination of bourgeois ideas over the working class but also the catastrophic state of the economic crisis in the former USSR, just as it was in the Balkans.

Within Russia the decline in the economy has been dramatic. The main body of Russian industry, which according to Western analysts was privatised for 3.6% of its value, is now in the hands of a new bourgeoisie who have emerged from the old red bourgeoisie of the USSR. They are mainly party and state officials, and Yeltsin and his cronies such as the tycoon Berezovsky are the representatives of this new elite. The chaos and dislocation this brought has been seen in asset stripping, flight of capital overseas, and the spread of corruption and lawlessness connected to the highest levels of government. *Le Monde Diplomatique* (12/99) has calculated that 50% of the economy is now no longer subject to the rule of law. The last 8 years have seen manufacturing activity decline by 40% and overall economic activity by 50%. Production is now simply half of what it was when the USSR broke up in 1991. The suffering that this has produced for the Russian working class is difficult to believe. Russian workers were paid 25% of what their class brothers in the west received in 1991, by August 1998 this had dropped to 1.5%! It is commonplace for wages to be paid months in arrears. Some workers have not been paid any wages for over a year. Strikes by miners, teachers, hospital workers and other workers have broken out throughout Russia, demanding, not wage increases or better conditions, but simply that wage arrears are paid. Yeltsin has not hesitated to use special forces to crush these strikes and demonstrations wherever possible. The latest example of this is the assault by riot police on miners of the Kusbass region in December. Over the last decade, as well as wage reductions and non payment of wages, the services provided by the



state, such as healthcare and education have virtually collapsed. It is, in fact, doubtful if the Tsarist regime a century ago, could have got away with the outrages which are today inflicted on the Russian working class.

Although the working class has endured these attacks the regime was desperately unpopular and widely discredited. In this situation the manufacture of an internal enemy, the Chechens, and the whipping up of national chauvinism for a new war against this enemy was the regime's answer.

Within Chechnia the situation of the working class is, if anything, worse than that in Russia. Chechnia is an oil rich region itself and was one of the richer republics in the Russian Federation. Apart from a small amount of agriculture oil production and refining is the main industry. Before World War One Chechnia produced 18% of Russia's oil, and in this period 60% of the capital invested in its oil was foreign, 80% of this British. Chechen oil peaked in 1932 when production was 11 million tonnes annually but by the start of the 1994 war this had dropped to 1 million tonnes with only 100 of the region's 1500 wells still operating. Chechnia was also a centre of oil refining producing most of the lubricants and paraffin products for the USSR. The war of 1994

to 96 virtually stopped all oil production as workers were conscripted and enormous destruction of the infrastructure took place. Under the Khasavyurt peace agreement the Russian Federal authorities promised to rebuild Chechnia but this has not occurred. Economic activity is now desperately reduced with the largest sources of income coming from narcotics, weapons trading and kidnapping rather than oil. Most economic activity is in the hands of the most powerful families and the war lords and outside the control of the state. Poverty and unemployment are endemic and young people without income or prospects are open to the siren calls of the nationalists and Islamic reactionaries.

### The Working Class Holds the Key

As has been shown above the war is an imperialist one and cannot possibly benefit the working class in any way. Workers should not give any support to Russian or Chechen nationalism or the stupidities of Islam. The only way forward for the working class is a complete break with nationalism and imperialism. The key factor here is the Russian working class. It is clear that

the war is driven by both the machinations of imperialism in general and the desperation of the Russian ruling class in particular.

At present the confusion and low level of consciousness of the Russian working class has given Prime Minister and acting-President Putin one election triumph. His programme is now one of aggressive Russian nationalism. Putin has responded to US manoeuvres in the Caucasus, and to the resumption of "star wars" type tests by the US (in violation of treaties signed with Russia) by conjuring up the spirit of Alexander III (the most reactionary Tsar of the last century but the last one to expand the Russian Empire). He has already warned that Russia's nuclear stockpiles will be used to defend Russia's basic interests including its oil pipelines. There can be no mistake in the current world the arrogance of US imperialism is being matched by the revival of Russian imperialism. This is what is behind the charnel house in the Caucasus.

So far only the mothers of the dead have broken the patriotic propaganda to tell us that 3000 young Russian men have already died in Chechnia. It is only when the entire Russian working class realises what the butchery brings that imperialist massacre will end. But that would only be the beginning.

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## The War in Daghestan

**Behind the conflict,  
enormous economic interests linked to the control of petroleum resources**

*To put the previous article in context, we produce here a translation from Battaglia Communista about the conflict which preceded the current war in Chechnia.*

Hardly have we had time to celebrate the end of the war in Kosovo than another war has begun near the Caspian Sea. By now it is clear to all, even to the most convinced defenders of this criminal system of production, that capitalism in its imperialist phase can only kindle ever more ferocious wars all around the world, even in those areas seemingly without any immediate economic/political/military interest. An area like

the Caucasus, seemingly quite distant from the great commercial and financial channels of the planet and with no particular interest from an economic or political perspective, is in fact the centre of one of the greatest inter-imperialist clashes of the end of this millennium.

For more than a month, the Wahabiti guerrillas led by Shamil Basaev, the undisputed leader of the Daghestan rebels with a somewhat turbulent past

as a minister of the Chechen Republic, have been putting the Russian war machine through a harsh ordeal. The clashes, beginning as simple skirmishes in the mountains surrounding the capital Makhachkala, have spread throughout Daghestan, resulting in hundreds of dead every day. The Wahabiti guerrillas, thanks to their ideological-political propaganda amongst the most politically backward layers of Daghestan's population and

especially thanks to the military aid received by the bordering Islamic countries (but suspicions of western aid grow stronger) have transformed the skirmishes into open military confrontations, leading recently to heavy losses amongst the Russian forces.

Military escalation over the last few months is the natural consequence of the political and economic crisis which led to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. A crisis which has literally changed the political geography of the planet, especially in the Caucasus region. Thanks to the collapse of Russia, the various national bourgeoisies partially freeing themselves from the soviet yoke have launched their political-military offensives to better defend their class interests. In the vacuum left by the collapse of the soviet empire all manner of illicit activities have prospered. The legalised robbery conducted by the "Communist" Party has been followed by organised crime. An entire area has become the plundering ground for Mafia organisations. For that reason, in the early nineties, there appeared on the political scene personalities like Shamil Basaev linked to Islamic fundamentalism, which in opposition to Russian imperialism seeks to impose Islamic Law on Daghestan and Chechnya. As in Algeria, Iran and so many other countries the rebirth of nationalism has exploited reactionary Islamic extremism. Precisely because of the rebirth of religious fanaticism has it been possible to absorb within boundaries acceptable to capitalism all the demands and anger of millions of dispossessed, reduced to hunger by the profit drive both of the Russian and the native bourgeoisie. But behind the ascendance of Islam lie much more substantial material interests, which make of the area one of the most important cross-roads in the production and distribution of petroleum from the Caspian Sea.

Behind the attempts to impose Islam which have bloodied Chechnya, Daghestan and other countries of the

Caucasus area in recent years, religious motives are only the cover behind which the various criminal groups fight for domination of political-military control of the entire area. They are the same interests which have led the great



Commander Basaev — Islamic freedom fighter or Western pawn?

powers to intervene so heavily in Kosovo and to bombard Yugoslavia the control of the Caspian oil market. The prize at stake in the Caucasus area is truly huge. Daghestan shares a long frontier with Azerbaijan, the country at the centre of a network of oil and gas pipes, which in coming years will stretch from the Caspian Sea to Europe, crossing Georgia and Turkey to the Mediterranean and to the South, across Iran to the Persian gulf. According to some surveys carried out by the large oil companies, over the next ten years, over 4 million barrels of oil could be extracted from the area every day, a quantity almost equal to that extracted from the North Sea. It is precisely the control of this enormous quantity of crude oil which lies behind the clashes which daily bloody the countries of the region.

The separatist demands of Daghestan are incompatible with the interests of Russian imperialism; in fact, the loss of control here would mean the definitive loss of Georgia and Azerbaijan from the Russian orbit, with all the negative consequences as regards the control of petroleum. The war arising in recent months in the area of the Caspian Sea is only a phase in the wider war unfolding on an international level for control of the petroleum market amongst the various imperialist powers for control of the

petroleum market. A market which has become very important for two reasons. Oil, considered purely and simply as a primary material for use in the productive process enters almost every part of the productive cycle. It is a determining element in the formation of production costs and therefore in the average rate of profit, it is easy to see how a slight variation in its price reflects on profit rates. What is more, as oil is only purchased on the international markets in dollars it has become the most powerful means in the hands of the USA, the country with monopoly over printing dollars, to manage financial revenue on a world scale (for the obvious reason of lack of space we ask readers to refer to recent articles appearing in *Prometeo*).

Behind the large scale turn in the Wahabiti offensive in Daghestan are hidden various foreign countries which, following the downfall of the Soviet Empire cultivate the dream of securing control over the huge petroleum resources. Already the great oil companies, especially from the U.S.A., have economically penetrated the region, deeply undermining the Russian monopoly. Now the confrontation is taking place on a more openly politico-military terrain, so much so that the increased financing of the guerrillas is strongly suspected to be due to western sources. It is no coincidence that the American political class in the international press has invited the White House to focus on Daghestan, thus preventing the Caucasus becoming the Wild West for oil. In essence they are inviting the West (read the USA) to not repeat the error of delaying armed intervention as occurred in the Balkans. The American political writer Robert D. Kaplan states:

*The West has in essence ignored the Balkans until the outbreak of war in 1991. Now has arrived the time to consider the future of the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea. After Kosovo, will we see a new American intervention within the borders of the ex-USSR?*

From *Battaglia Comunista* 10, 1999



# World Trade Organisation, Seattle

Seattle, November 30th December 3rd, delegates attempted to meet for the 3rd ministerial conference of the WTO (World Trade Organisation). In all the WTO leadership and the major capitalist nations hoped that this new round of meetings would iron out more of the problems they faced and still face. The ultimate problem that they face is that of the rate of profit. The WTO is, in the end, another battlefield between the national and regional delegations, with the lobbyists of the multinationals stood behind them. The battle concerns one thing alone, the rate of profit, and how the various nations and their groupings can grab as much as they can by a suitable arrangement of the rules of trade and investment flows. It is simply another area where imperialist competition is played out — but around a table in a closed room.

## The Ministerial meetings

*It is vital to maintain and consolidate what has already been achieved*

said Mike Moore, the New Zealand Director-General of the WTO. He was disappointed as were many of the delegations. The US looked to focus on forcing decisions, thus making progress for US multi-national and finance interests. European and Japanese sought a broader agenda favouring the idea of trading off gains for one set of interests against another. The countries of the periphery, those some would call third world or under developed, still cried out against their effective exclusion from the decision-making process. The Cairns group of food producing countries (e.g., Australia, New Zealand, Argentina etc.) had their own agenda. Mike Moore had hoped that the WTO agenda could just barrel along without being clearly defined. He was mistaken. As Charlene Barshefsky, conference chair and US trade representative, made clear

*We found as time passed that divergences of opinion remained*  
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*that would not be overcome rapidly*

they had to retire to try again later, because there were real oppositions which could not be bullied, mainly by the US, into submission. Even Moore's attempts to foist guilt upon all concerned, that lack of agreement would disadvantage the poorest countries, cut no ice.

Discussions showed what the WTO is all about. Major areas such as market access, agriculture and labour standards were discussed. These have had to be discussed in working groups to allow access by the delegates of the poorest countries who simply could not get into previous meetings. In each major area there is disagreement. The question of labour standards pits the US against the peripheral countries who see this as an attempt to destroy what little industry they have, or allow it to be taken over lock, stock and barrel by the giants of US and other finance. The Cairns group (of rich agricultural producers like Australia) come up against the EU over farm production, seeing EU agriculture rules as a form of protectionism. While the US has called for an abandonment of all farm export subsidies, Japan has called anti-dumping legislation, particularly over steel and micro-chips. These are both coded messages against the covert trade barriers the more powerful states use to protect their own industry in the face of the crisis.

*The battles are not only on the streets, they are in closed rooms with heavy political pressure. It is business as usual in the WTO. The smaller developing countries have been bullied by the powerful trading blocs. They are only being consulted when the US or the EU wants something. Their issues are ignored and their agenda is being marginalized.*

Barry Coates, Director, World Development Movement. While Barshefsky talked in high and grand terms of absolute transparency, recognising the anger at the previous exclusion of poor countries from the process, she asserted clearly that the

WTO will work for the US or it will not work at all.

*I reserve the right to use a more exclusive process to achieve a final outcome.*

Business as usual for the WTO is to lay claim to openness, democracy and a sensitivity towards the poor, but then behind a heavily drawn curtain to ensure that the important decisions are made with or without all present. It is worthy of grand opera, and one encompassing tragedy, betrayal, aristocratic sentiments, but unfortunately the deaths of all but the main characters, and perhaps the eventual maiming of even one or two of them in the final act.

## The street party, but not yet the Revolutionary Party

Out in the streets environmentalists, the populist right, Christians, liberals, anarchists, gay and feminist activists, trades unionists and many others, put forward differing arguments and slogans. The demonstration was hoped by many to be another street party along the lines of other previous manifestations against the debt of the peripheral countries, as on June 18th. It became at times a violent confrontation, with some looting and property damage, but more it gave the chance for the state machine to show just how far it could exercise its underlying brutality and its capacity for overreaction<sup>2</sup>. This included

- tear gassing delegates, undoubtedly a new experience for them, which we can only welcome,
- having arrested only 70 on the first day the police were forced make sure of a higher body count later and so arrested 500 on the second day,
- declaring a state of emergency in the face of a ample demonstration, telling people to stay at home, promptly ignored,

- corraling delegates needlessly in hotels.

The slogans encompassed – “Desire Armed”, “Burn the Rich”, “Never Forget”, “We want to Live not Survive”, as well as “We are Winning”.

But we are not winning, yet, we have barely started. To demonstrate is not enough. If we are lucky the odd word might be altered in an agreement, something might be held back, to reappear another day. All that we can hope for from demonstrations alone is that a few crumbs might be tossed onto the table, or from it to us below. We cannot reform this capitalist system. Nor is the battle to be found in one issue or another, nor even a simple coming together of single issues.

But we can say that more people are realising that there is something wrong and that they should do something about it. It is not enough to reform capital so that it is kind to the environment. It is not enough to follow the liberal democrats such as Susan George in looking for a completion of some sort of democratic process and winning fair trade for the “third world”. It is certainly not in the agenda of the AFL-CIO and other trades unionists (as in Scargill and the SLP) who want to return to a reactionary protectionist nationalism. It is interesting to note that the Seattle police faithfully separated the lines of the independent workers who attended the demonstrations from the union affiliates. One unionist said

*This WTO is about jobs. It's about standards of living falling right the way round the world as trade liberalises. Corporations are writing the rules to maximise profits. That's the sole purpose of the WTO.*

Not even close. The WTO is part of the whole attempt by a globalised capitalism to restructure the way the whole of the world economy is conducted. It is a symptom and not the disease – the disease is capitalism itself. We cannot return to the comfortable days of the boom years if ever they were comfortable. Countless millions face a leaner and leaner time of it, or face worse. Little or no life at all, apart from privation, starvation and disease. It is true that profit is the key – but the way for us as

internationalists must be to attack capitalism itself. We should not just be demonstrating, we should be using our power as producers and paralyse the production that is the lifeblood of capitalism.

The demonstration comprised, in essence, three very different groups of opposition to the WTO:

- the rainbow of single-issue demonstrators, from the right to Christians and liberals
- trades unionists who conscientiously led their delegations away from individual working class demonstrators
- lastly, the individual workers for whom 30 years of crisis is enough

The single-issue groups ultimately lead only to potential reformist solutions under capitalism for each issue fought over, despite the seemingly radical language they might use. The trades unionists represent just a statist version of capitalism and again more reformism. The independent workers represent possibilities.

### To win we must start the real fight

**W**e are witnessing more than a rearrangement of the deckchairs on the Titanic. The officers are frantically urging all of us to paddle like mad, or they are pushing us overboard and telling us to push. Stuart Eizenstat of the US treasury plaintively asked

*We need your help. The message is that trade makes life better. We need to demystify the WTO and explain that trade helps create new middle classes everywhere.*

They want us to support more of them. The real message is that as capitalism lurches on from iceberg to iceberg, the only thing that can make life better is not the reinforcement of the better off. Nor is it a better working of democracy, worldwide, nor protection of industries in this or that country.

Demonstrations might be some sort of beginning, but they are not the ultimate tool in the armoury. There they have to be broken. We have to take on

capitalism all over the world, and here workers independent of the unions and other reformist campaigns taking to the streets to oppose such bodies as the WTO is a heartening event. However demonstrations alone will not halt capitalism's destruction of the planet or its reproduction of war and famine. The capitalist system can only operate because millions produce commodities which are then appropriated by the global capitalist class. We create their wealth. As Rosa Luxemburg wrote nearly a century ago it is at the point of production where the chains of exploitation are forged. We can only really hurt capitalism by attacking it where it is most vulnerable and where potentially workers come together collectively. Capitalism does force us to fight collectively here and there but this is not enough either. Only when the working class re-discovers the historic programme which its own past experience has created will it recognise the need to destroy the system and build a new society. This means fighting politically as well as economically. This means we must organise internationally – beginning with just those independent workers who were present at places like Seattle. At the moment their lack of a coherent programme is a weakness not a strength. Against a global capitalism we need to have a globally organised working class. Only an international party of the world working class can co-ordinate and develop the real fight against capitalism itself.

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### Footnotes

1. A student commented “The people who smashed and burned were the poor. Look at what they left. No-one it seems was interested in giant hamburger chain Wendy’s or expensive bars and hotels.” The targets were food, clothing, shoe and television stores. One set of coffee houses, Starbucks, were picketed and attacked over the low wages paid to staff.

2. The police used pepper spray, teargas, batons, rubber bullets and pellets and more against unarmed demonstrators, mainly the peaceful, but the Mayor capped it all by an addition to the civil emergency order by banning the sale of gas masks, a banning of all demonstrations and a curfew.



# Correspondence on the WTO

*Debate on the current state of the working class and how revolutionaries can develop the increasing anger of workers into a genuine class revolutionary movement are becoming more the order of the day. Our correspondence section in this issue is devoted entirely to that debate. On page 31 we debate with the ICL on the electricians strike. But we begin with an email we received replying to the IBRP statement on the WTO (published in Internationalist Communist 17). We are also reproducing a leaflet (originally written for a web bulletin board) distributed by the author of the email at the Seattle protest. Our reply to both is on page 30.*

Dear comrades,

In your statement on the confrontations over the WTO Ministerial, you neglected to mention that there were many ordinary proletarians in Seattle on N30-D01 who were *not* there to demonstrate under union banners or leftist group banners. And that they were demonstrating against the WTO as an organization symbolizing globalizing capital. These proletarians have few if any illusions that abolishing the WTO is the same thing as abolishing capitalism. However, many of them do see the movement to destroy the WTO as an important part — a first step? — of the broader, longer-term struggle to resist capital and the state. Many of them believe that if this movement can succeed in abolishing the WTO, that it will represent a positive effort towards resisting global capital's increasing domination and destruction of all life on this planet, as it will both help to foster a much greater awareness amongst the proletariat of the stakes involved at this turn of the century and millennium *and* that it will help to "empower" the proletarian masses by showing them that we ordinary working, or unemployed, people — are capable of standing up to capital and the state and stopping in their tracks their programs of ever greater exploitation and destruction. Also, it was clear to many of these people that the unions' role in the events of N30 was **completely reactionary**: the unions kept their contingent — roughly half of the total

50,000+ protesters — distinctly away from the "radical activist" contingent (that is the contingent which actually

football stadium for speeches by the union bosses (Sweeney, head of the AFL-CIO, etc.) Apparently (I say this



*Seattle demonstration. The WTO is the symptom - the disease is capitalism*

shot down the WTO on N30), marching them away from direct confrontation with the WTO organization and representatives, and the forces of state repression there to protect them, to a

because I read of it in some e-mail on a message board of anti-WTO protesters from Vancouver, Canada, where I am), several thousand union members in the union parade saw what was really going on and actively broke through the union "security" goon line to join up in active solidarity with the "radicals". If this is true, this event in itself represents a significant step forward in workers' class consciousness in North America.

You write: "Once the people who produce capitalism's wealth begin to wake up to the fact that there is

**<http://www.ibrp.org> — Soon to be improved!**

*From a recent email.*

I find your work fascinating, and I greatly appreciate what you make available on the web, as well your editorials and your assailing of those of us who are beginning to understand. Keep the articles and editorials coming. They are truly of very high quality.

sincerely, rb

an alternative to capitalism and that it lies within their grasp. " But it is the beginning of this *waking up* that Seattle N30 represents, but not yet so much that there is an alternative to capitalism, but rather that there is a massive and rapidly growing opposition to capital's increasingly destructive domination of all life on earth and that this opposition is not just confined to this or that sector of the class but is instead generalized throughout the whole class. It is the beginning of a waking up to the fact that we don't have to individualistically submit to capitalist totalitarianism, a waking up to the fact that there is a growing resistance movement emerging which can foster solidarity,

awareness, and community in struggle. It is true there are still many confusions in this movement, particularly those concerning bourgeois democracy. And it is also true that at this point in time we are not talking about a *class* movement, but rather an inter-class one. However, to not see the *turning around* from a state of apathy and resignation amongst (at least a segment of) the proletarian youth of North America to one of resistance, solidarity, increasing awareness of the reality of globalizing capitalist domination, and renewed hope for our future — that we poor proles can have an impact if we act collectively and militantly — is to miss the significance of what happened in Seattle. It will be

the role communists to help demonstrate to increasing numbers of proletarians what is the real alternative to capitalist barbarization.

Fraternally, E.

P.S. I and a comrade of mine from Seattle intervened in events, not on N30 or D01, but on Saturday, D04. I couldn't get off work and down there until then, unfortunately — amongst several hundred protesters outside the jail where 500+ arrested protesters were being held — with a leaflet I composed on "The WTO and Democracy" and one by the group *Internationalist Perspective* entitled "Profit Kills".

### The leaflet of Wage Slave X

## THE WTO AND DEMOCRACY

Many anti-WTO critics allege that the WTO is not a "democratic organization". The assumption is that if the WTO actually was a "democratic organization" that there would be nothing wrong with the WTO, nothing to protest, and nothing to oppose. What a joke! "Democracy" has absolutely nothing to do with it. It is the content of the WTO's agenda that is to be opposed, not the process by which its representatives are selected. The government of the USA is "democratic", its members selected by "democratic" means. Most Americans eligible to (register to) vote don't do so. Is that because they are stupid or because they don't care what the government does? Obviously not. Rather, they know — as well as anybody knows anything — that "democracy" is a joke, that it has nothing to do with "the will of the people". Voting doesn't change anything. The bureaucratic capitalist state controls the whole "democratic" process and all the parties of any political significance. It's all controlled from the top, and we at the bottom (of the power ladder) are merely asked to approve one or another of the carefully selected candidates listed on our ballot.

"Democracy" is the greatest mystification of our time. Its actual role in the functioning of this society is to provide a smokescreen for the ongoing exploitation and destruction of life by capital and the violent repression of the state when people try to defend themselves from this destruction.

The reason to oppose the WTO is that it represents the drive to the unfettered and total domination of capital over all life on the planet. As the WTO is a single organization representing GLOBAL CAPITAL, protesting it offers all those who are without power and without capital in this world to, for once, band together on as large a scale as possible to vent their RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE!

And remember, this is just the beginning of the new (21st century) round of GLOBAL RESISTANCE to global capital. This movement has no need for "democratic" states. Its mode of decision making will tend essentially towards consensus after a thoroughgoing debate by all wherein the issues will be clarified for all, and the decisions required will become clear to (almost) all. (In a relatively few cases concerning highly controversial issues, majority rule will have to

suffice, but only so long as it doesn't split the movement.) Its mode of carrying out these decisions will be DIRECT ACTION by all those involved. This movement will become, as it develops, increasingly antagonistic to CAPITALISM as a totality against all states and all forms of hierarchical power, against commodity production for profit and ALL trade/exchange based on equivalence of value, and thus against money in all its guises, finally, and above all, AGAINST WAGE SLAVERY for the masses. It will be FOR a united world HUMAN COMMUNITY of all ordinary working people united in their OWN autonomous organizations so that all of us can finally take control of our own collective fate. Once upon a time, this movement was known as the "international communist movement". Unfortunately, in this time of the "death of communism" and the universal "triumph of democracy", most of today's anti-WTO protesters are ignorant of all this. Perhaps as the tear gas and pepper spray clears in the wake of the "battle of Seattle", the mists of confusion and ideological control which capital imposes on us, will finally begin to dissipate.

Wage Slave X, December 1, 1999



# After Seattle

## Our Reply to Wage Slave X

**T**he IBRP statement on the WTO is in the current issue of Internationalist Communist or can be read on our website

As we replied to E. on receipt of his message, that statement was actually written before the actual meeting of the WTO in Seattle so we did not know precisely who would be there. However as our leaflet clearly states

*WTO or no WTO global capitalism is creating the basis for worldwide resistance. Never before has the gulf between the richest and poorest been so great. Never before have so many human beings been without the basic necessities of life. Never before has capitalism been so centralised and the reality of capitalist exploitation of wage labour laid so bare. Never before has it been so apparent that the condition of the working class is essentially the same the world over....Even if they are misguided, the fact that many of the anti-WTO demonstrators are protesting against capitalism shows that ruling class propaganda about the present order being the natural state of things is wearing a bit thin. And not before time!*

As we don't think the unions, the ecologists or the Christians have a minimally anti-capitalist agenda we plead "not guilty" to the charge of ignoring the possibility that there would be proletarians there! There is

also no intention in any of our publications to condemn anyone who attended the anti-WTO protest to carry out propaganda for left communist politics. What E has done has helped to flesh out some of the details of what went on in Seattle and this is one reason why we found his response interesting.

However, what is open to debate is the significance of the Seattle protests. For E, Seattle is the "beginning of the waking up" to the fact that "we poor proles can have an impact if we act collectively and militantly". For us, Seattle, and events like it, are not where the real class battles will be won and lost. The material power of the working class lies in the fact that without its labour capitalism cannot function. It is at the point where we labour that we also have a collective capacity for resistance. If there were waves of strikes demonstrations like Seattle would turn into something more - confrontations which lead to threat to the state. This would indeed be a new beginning for the working class. At the moment however there is one important element which Wage Slave X leaves out. In telling us to "rage against capitalism" he is not actually telling us to do anything. It sounds like a phrase of despair. For us the overthrow of capitalism will be a conscious act of the working class. For this the working class need to be organised politically into a class party.

This is why events like Seattle represent an opportunity to make

propaganda for a class which acts collectively, militantly and consciously in its own interest. We do not doubt for a moment that E also understands the need for this consciousness, but where will this consciousness come from, and what will happen to movements where this consciousness is absent? To answer the second question first, without sufficient class consciousness, movements of workers are transformed into tools of other classes. This is true, both "historically" for example, in the German revolution and more recent v. for example, Roumania, and the Chinese democracy protests. Can it be denied that workers in all of these examples acted collectively and militantly? Can it be denied that in the first case class consciousness was insufficiently widespread, and in the others was almost entirely absent? Can it be denied that the workers were used by other classes? No, and we are sure that E does not deny this.

And now to the first question where does class consciousness come from? Is it a spontaneous development of collective and militant action? It is true that the elements of class consciousness, that capitalism (at least as presently constituted) works against the working class, that the working class must act to change things, there must be an alternative, are "in the air". But there must be a revolutionary minority to act as a nucleus for these elements to crystallise around, and this minority must defeat the rival nuclei of bourgeois political formations, so that the crystallisation takes the correct form: capitalism, however constituted, is the enemy of the working class, the change resulting from working class action must be the dictatorship of the proletariat, the only alternative is communism. In short, Seattle cannot yet be judged to be a beginning. It is, at best, the herald of a period in which opportunities for communist propaganda are greater. This possibility is to be welcomed, and, if it materialises, its opportunities are to be seized with both hands.

### Internationalist Communist 17

Review of the International  
Bureau for the Revolutionary Party

Control Over the Oil Market in an Epoch Where  
Finance Dominates

IBRP statement: The WTO is a Symptom,  
the Disease is Capitalism  
War and Revolutionary Politics

IBRP statement: Revolutionaries Faced with the Prospect of War and the  
Current Situation of the Working Class

Idealism or Marxism: Once Again on the Fatal Flaws of the ICC  
Review article: Sylvia Pankhurst:

The Real Meaning of her Revolutionary Years



# Correspondence with the ICC

Dear comrades

...we note that there seems to be a disagreement between our organisations over the "rank and file" body organising the electricians' strike. In WR 228 and 229 we have defined this as a radical trade unionist organ, while the current issue of RP seems to argue that it is proletarian in character. We would be interested to know how you come to this conclusion and would welcome any information on the matter.

Fraternal Communist Greetings

World Revolution

Section in Britain of the International Communist Current

## CWO Reply

Dear Comrades

Your letter asked about the recent article on the electricians strike in the last Revolutionary Perspectives (Number 15). We not only anticipated that we would disagree with you on this event but we even predicted that you would simply dismiss it as

*... a very radical rank and file organisation which seeks to contain the workers' discontent within the union framework."*

World Revolution 229

First of all the question here is not about a different view of trades unionism, as we hope the article makes clear. We do not disagree that the main substance of the rank and file movement is a form of radical shop

stewardism and radical shop stewardism has in the past been the last line of defence of the trades unions themselves. The stewards have thus helped the unions to confine the struggle within the limits of capitalism. Perhaps in this electricians' strike many of the stewards themselves (we do not know the details well enough) were consciously trying to revive trade unionism as the form of organisation for the working class in order to simply win wage increases. However this is not the main issue between us.

The real difference of approach is one of method and perspectives (yet again).

Currently the level of working class response does not in any way correspond to the desperate situation we as a class are in. In this situation almost any action taken by workers on their own account is to be welcomed. The fact that the electricians had their

own financial set up independent of the unions helped to forge a first step towards a real struggle organisation outside of the unions. However we are not so blind that we cannot see that "first step" means only that. Once the issue which gave rise to the particular struggle passes the workers will usually lapse back into normal trade union practice.

But these moments are the kinds of thing which will happen to show how the working class can practically move away from the union as it moves into struggle. Workers are not necessarily going to make a clean break with the unions before they begin to struggle for themselves. The break will come in the process of struggle and be based on practical experience. In the electricians' struggle they did come up directly against the union machine. The fact that they were able to ignore it was because they had their own funds and a network which did not depend on the AEEU. As we noted in the article this was not enough.

*Funds are an immediate material necessity but they are not enough on their own. What is also needed is a degree of self-organisation which involves everyone in the struggle and which seek to find ways of creating the widest possible solidarity within the working class. The sparks, for all the use of traditional trade union language have begun to show how that can practically be done.*

RP15 p.4

What did you write? Simply that

*a radical rank and file organisation has developed over the past year which seeks to contain the workers' discontent*

*within the union framework ... This is a very real trap for workers*

WR 229 p.3

And that is all! You don't say anything about the fact that the electricians broke the law in not waiting for union ballots (the first step towards challenging the state). Why do you not say anything positive about the actual struggle? The answer is two-fold. In the first place you only address the potential revolutionary vanguard. You have nothing to say to real working class struggle.

Second, you still have a perspective that the working class is really, "subterraneanly" conscious of the need to smash capitalism. The only "mystification" which holds the struggle back is that put about by the trades

unions. If only the working class was "demystified" of its trades unionism then they would take the revolutionary path. This is one of the examples of your semi-religious idealism. The Marxist method knows that the working class will become revolutionary through its practical experience and the revolutionary programme which we defend will most closely match the needs of a class that grows in consciousness. It will not be a question of, 1. "demystifying" the workers 2. then go into struggle. The demystification, the struggle and the reacquisition of its own programme will all occur simultaneously as part of the movement against capitalism.

In the meantime we must begin from where the working class is today and recognise the small steps it takes which may not be all that significant now but which show that we are not completely in thrall to capitalism. This is in some ways a repeat of what we said to you



about the December 1995 strikes in France. You are so convinced that the working class is more prepared than it really is that actual struggle is never good enough for you. The programme defended by the Communist Left is the product of the painful struggles of the past but to give it life we have to know how to relate it to the embryonic and confused struggles of the present.

From the foregoing we hope you can see that your letter makes a false distinction between your view that the electricians struggle was "a radical trades unionist" one whereas "RP seems to argue that it is proletarian in character". Nowhere do we call it proletarian. All we have to do is analyse what potential the strikes had and criticise their weaknesses. The reason is that every struggle will begin on a bourgeois terrain (by definition under capitalism!) and may begin to move away from it. The electricians strike was a passing episode which did not go very far but it threw up some interesting lessons given the current weakness of working class struggle. When something is moving it is not helpful to apply labels and epithets. But this is another lesson the ICC has yet to learn...

for the CWO

## Footnote

1. You might also have sent us a letter asking why the text "Should revolutionaries work in reactionary trades unions?" appeared on our website and then was taken off. The answer is simple. It should not have been there in the first place but was mistaken for another text by an IBRP member. It was an illustration of the danger of using electronic media. The error was only spotted when a member of *Notes Internationalistes* (Canada) wrote asking us about it! The use of this error to make a useless and inaccurate polemic against the IBRP's supposed lack of rigour in defining who is and who is not a member only underlines the absolutely sectarian and untrustworthy nature of your "polemics".

## Our Basic Positions

1. *We aim to become part of the future world working class party which will guide the class struggle towards the establishment of a stateless, classless, moneyless society without exploitation, national frontiers or standing armies and in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all (Marx): Communism.*

2. *Such a society will need a revolutionary state for its introduction. This state will be run by workers' councils, consisting of instantly recallable delegates from every section of the working class. Their rule is called the dictatorship of the proletariat because it cannot exist without the forcible overthrow and keeping down of the capitalist class worldwide.*

3. *The first stage in this is the political organisation of class-conscious workers and their eventual union into an international political party for the promotion of world revolution.*

4. *The Russian October Revolution of 1917 remains a brilliant inspiration for us. It showed that workers could overthrow the capitalist class. Only the isolation and decimation of the Russian working class destroyed their revolutionary vision of 1917. What was set up in Russia in the 1920's and after was not communism but centrally planned state capitalism. There have as yet been no communist societies anywhere in the world.*

5. *The International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party was founded by the heirs of the Italian Left who tried to fight the political degeneration of the Russian Revolution and the Comintern in the 1920's. We are continuing the task which the Russian Revolution promised but failed to achieve — the freeing of the workers of the world and the establishment of communism. Join us!*

## Public Meetings

**Barnsley**

*Why do Workers Need a Revolutionary Party?*

Victoria Hotel  
Sheffield Road

Wednesday 9th February  
7:30pm

**London**

*Communism — What it is and how to get it*

Saturday 4th March  
2:30pm

Conway Hall  
(Artists' Room)  
Red Lion Square  
Holborn

**Newcastle**

*The Politics of Sylvia Pankhurst*

Saturday 11th March  
2:00pm

Central Library  
(Seminar Room)  
Princess Square  
Newcastle upon Tyne



# Internationalist Communist

*Central Review of the International Bureau for the Revolutionary Party*

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